



fig.1 Attributed to Paul Kane, *The Surveyor - John Henry Lefroy*, c.1853, oil on canvas, 56 x 77 cm, Glenbow Museum, Calgary. (Photo: Glenbow Museum, 55.31.3)

IDENTIFYING A LONG- (AND STILL) LOST EARLY PAUL KANE PAINTING, AND ATTRIBUTING A RELATED WORK TO ROBERT C. TODD

Some thirteen years ago, while working on *When Winter was King*, a small loan exhibition and related publication for the Whyte Museum of the Canadian Rockies in Banff, I was able to relate an unattributed canvas in the collection of the Glenbow Museum, Calgary, to a Paul Kane painting exhibited first in Toronto in 1847 (fig.1).¹ Known then as *The Fur Trader*, the painting had been acquired by the Glenbow Foundation from the Laing Gallery, Toronto in 1955. Suspecting it might be a Kane, Douglas Leechman, Director of Western Canadiana at the Glenbow, wrote the following year to Kenneth Kidd at the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto to see if he would offer an opinion.² After viewing a photograph of the painting, Kidd cautiously affirmed in 1957 that it probably was by Kane.³ Eleanor Ediger of the Art Division at the Glenbow then approached Clifford Wilson of *The Beaver* in Winnipeg, who responded by return mail that he thought the principal figure in the painting was John Henry Lefroy whose collection of letters, edited by George Stanley of the Royal Military College, Kingston, had been published recently in a volume entitled *In Search of the Magnetic North*. The frontispiece of that book, an 1853 George Theodore Berthon portrait of Lefroy, suggested the identification.⁴ Ediger then wrote to Stanley, who, while admitting there was some resemblance between the figure in the painting and Berthon's portrait, would not support the identification because he recalled no reference in Lefroy's papers to such a work by Kane.⁵ Investigation was put aside for three-and-a-half years until Moncrieff Williamson, then Director of the Art Department at the Glenbow, approached J. Russell Harper at the National Gallery of Canada with his theory that the painting was a portrait by Cornelius Krieghoff of his close friend, John Budden.⁶ The painting was subsequently sent to Ottawa for examination. According to Harper, the "Conservation people" (likely only Mervyn Ruggles, who had a special interest in Krieghoff), were almost prepared to accept the attribution, although the noted Krieghoff expert, Marius Barbeau, who had taken the opportunity to view the painting, was "very skeptical."⁷ It was returned to the Glenbow without confirming Krieghoff authorship, although his name remained most closely associated with the picture for the next twenty-five years.

In 1987 I was able to identify the Glenbow painting with a Paul Kane exhibited in the spring 1847 exhibition of the Toronto Society of Artists, catalogue number 29, *Scene in the North-West - Portrait*. I believed that two reviews of that exhibition confirmed the identification. One, in the *British Colonist* (10 April 1847), is brief: "A Scene in the North-West' representing Captain Lefroy, of the Royal Engineers, and his assistant, in a snow scene, is very generally and deservedly admired." Another later notice in the *Toronto Herald* (22 April 1847), is more generous. Among all the paintings in the exhibition, "the first which claims attention, and in fact bears away the palm of excellence, is a 'Scene in the North-west' or a Canadian winter scene, by Mr. Kane, our townsman, which reflects the highest credit on his talent and genius; the figure in the foreground is finely conceived, and beautifully finished, and the dogs and sleigh by his side are also inimitable, and the aerial perspective of the piece give it the appearance of reality." Lefroy, a career soldier in the Royal Artillery with an interest in science, had arrived in Toronto in October 1842 to take up the superintendancy of the observatory established there as part of a British government network to study terrestrial magnetism. The following spring he left Lachine, Lower Canada, on an eighteen-month journey along the Hudsons Bay Company routes into the Northwest as far as Fort Good Hope on the Mackenzie River, taking magnetic readings at over 300 sites along the way. Wintering over at Fort Chipewyan at the west end of Lake Athabaska he took observations every hour from mid-October 1843 to the end of February, and every two minutes during periods of high magnetic disturbances, resulting in calculations that established the site of the magnetic north. Returning to Toronto in the winter of 1844, Lefroy over the following years became a prominent figure in the scientific, artistic and social life of the city. In 1846 he married Emily, daughter of John Beverley Robinson, Chief Justice of Upper Canada, in a dual wedding with George Allan who took Emily's sister Louisa as his wife. The two grooms commissioned Berthon to paint the famous *The Three Robinson Sisters* (now displayed in The Grange at the Art Gallery of Ontario) as a surprise gift for their new inlaws. Lefroy helped found the Canadian (later Royal Canadian) Institute in 1849, serving as first vice-president 1851-52, and president 1852-53. He returned to England when the Toronto observatory was transferred to the Canadian government in April 1853.⁸ Lefroy's sojourn in the Northwest doubtless contributed to Kane's desire to undertake a similar journey. In fact Lefroy supported the artist's petition to travel in the Hudsons Bay Company precincts with two letters to Sir George Simpson, Governor of the company in the winter of 1845-46.⁹ This is precisely when Kane was undertaking *Scene in the North-West - Portrait*.

When I shared my discovery with Gilbert Gignac of what was then the Documentary Art and Photography Division of the Public Archives of Canada,



fig. 2 Paul Kane, *Scene in the Northwest - Portrait*, 1846-47, oil on canvas, dimensions unknown, location unknown. (Photo: National Archives of Canada, c-007112)



fig.3 Marell & Polyblank, Piccadilly, London, John Henry Lefroy, 1861, albumen print photograph, *carte de visite*, National Archives of Canada, Ottawa, Dale and Ryckman Family Collection (1996-201). (Photo: National Archives of Canada, PA-203034)

his jaw dropped. He then showed me a photograph of a finer version of exactly the same image — a painting at that time in the hands of Lefroy descendants in Britain (fig.2). I was sworn to secrecy, as the Archives was in the midst of negotiating its purchase. When I published the Glenbow painting in *When Winter Was King*, I described it as a “later replica” that “may or may not be” by Kane, while noting that “the original picture was likely painted in the winter of 1845-46, before Kane visited the west, and it was exhibited first in April 1847 while Kane was travelling on his epic journey to the Pacific coast and back.” Without revealing knowledge of the painting then in Britain, I speculated: “Perhaps the replica was made when Lefroy returned to England with the original about 1855.”¹⁰ The Archives was unable to acquire the original version, and its current whereabouts is unknown.

Comparing photographs of the two paintings we can see that they are remarkably similar. The only substantial differences are the absence in the Glenbow painting of what appears in the British version to be a hat sitting on top of the toboggan load just in front of Lefroy, and of an axe tucked into the upper binding behind him. Small containers in the front of the toboggan are interpreted differently in the Glenbow version, and the actual portrait of Lefroy is much more convincing in the original, if we compare it with the Berthon painting of 1853 (executed some seven years later) or a photograph of 1861 (fig.3). The Glenbow portrait is so different from these documented images of Lefroy as to seem to be another person. The original version is much more finely handled overall than the Glenbow, with greater attention to detail, a more accomplished command of form, and more convincing portrayal of atmosphere. The Glenbow version is generalized and flat by comparison. If we believe it was made when Lefroy was about to take the original back to England in 1853, then that was just at the point of Kane's last big push to complete his famous project of one hundred canvases acquired by George Allan in 1856. These works are now in the Royal Ontario Museum and represent the main bulk of Kane's studio production. It is believed he painted very little afterwards. It also has been suggested that Harriet Clench, who Kane married in 1853, and who was also a painter, assisted him in the studio.¹¹ Comparing the Glenbow version with the one known oil from her hand, a canvas of 1849 in the Art Gallery of Ontario, strongly suggests that she made the copy of Lefroy's commission.¹²

That Kane's portrayal of Lefroy in the North-west had currency well into the 1850s is also suggested by a remarkable painting that surfaced at a Montréal auction in 1984 (fig.4).¹³ *Northwestern Portrait*, c.1855, is not yet another version because it differs in so many ways from the Kane, but because of the similarity of certain details — the breed, general positioning and harnessing of the dogs, the rigging of the toboggan and its load, in the details of the leggings and garters of the principal figure, of the gun case, and of the wigwam, to point out



fig. 4 Attributed to Robert Clow Todd, *Northwestern Portrait*, c.1855, oil on panel, 33 x 38 cm, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, gift from the Volunteer Committee Fund in celebration of its 50th Anniversary, 1996 (96/175). (Photo: Art Gallery of Ontario)

just the most obvious — there can be no question but that the two works are closely related. The exceptionally fine finish of this discovery, which is painted with an unusual mixture of oil- and water-based pigments on a well-prepared wooden panel, seems unique in nineteenth-century Canadian painting.¹⁴ I know of no other instance of this particular mixed-media technique, although the robust, classically “sculptural” modeling, close attention to detail, and refined, smooth finish of the sharply silhouetted figures deliberately positioned within a carefully rendered atmospheric space, immediately reminded me of the work of Robert Clow Todd. It is as though the artist had used Kane’s concept as an authentic “setting” into which to drop a patron’s portrait, much as Todd had done earlier in his well-known Quebec City paintings where he positioned “portraits” of each patron’s precisely described sleigh into the stock setting of the frozen St. Lawrence in front of the Montmorency ice cone. Comparing the head of the large figure to the two known signed portraits by Todd, the oil on panel of *Narcisse Belleau* in the Musée du Québec, and the canvas of *Thomas Hamilton Oliver* currently on the Montréal art market, has convinced me that it is his work.¹⁵ The small Belleau dates to about 1835, so is at least twenty years earlier than the *Northwestern Portrait*. As well, the direction of the light is primarily from the right while principally from the left in the later work — but similarities abound. The technique, although more polished in the later work, is essentially the same: an adaptation of the miniaturist’s preparation of the ground that give a glow to the flesh, an acute sense of the sculptural form of the head, fine attention to detail, a similar conception of the structure of the area of the eyes, of the relationship of the brow to the nose, and of the shape of the lips. The visible ear is cursory in both. While the clothing in the later version is more detailed and highly finished, both examples display a vigorous plasticity. A comparison with the *Thomas Hamilton Oliver* portrait (dated 1840) is even more telling. The extraordinary visual interest in the sitter’s dark business clothes approaches the élan of the costume of the later figure. Again, there are striking similarities in the way the facial features are described, and the hands, somewhat crude in both cases, just roughly blocked out but with long, strong fingers, are also understood as three-dimensional forms in space. Todd, who had lived in Quebec City from 1833, settled in Toronto the summer of 1853, so he would not have had a chance to see the original version of Kane’s painting.¹⁶ Although he lived in the city until his death there in May 1866, advertising himself first as an artist (teaching drawing and painting), then as a banner, herald, sign and ornamental painter, no other work of Todd’s Toronto years is known.¹⁷

In recognition of its obvious relationship to Kane’s canvas, the painting is now called *Northwestern Portrait* and dated to c. 1855, however, we cannot be certain that it is by Todd. Nor can we be certain it is a direct response to what I have proposed is Harriet Clench’s copy of Kane’s composition. They may both

depend on a still-unknown third image. That this is Todd's only known Toronto painting remains an exciting conjecture nonetheless, and one that will inhabit my imagination until further information is found.

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Notes

1 Edward CAVELL and Dennis REID, *When Winter was King: The Image of Winter in 19th Century Canada* (Banff, Alberta: Altitude Publishing and The Whyte Museum of the Canadian Rockies, 1988). The exhibition opened at The Whyte Museum in January 1988, subsequently touring to the London Regional Art Gallery, Art Gallery of Windsor, and the McCord Museum, Montréal, where it closed October 1988.

2 Douglas Leechman to Kenneth Kidd, 4 June 1956, copy in registration files, Glenbow Museum, Calgary. All the following correspondence is in the same location.

3 Kidd to Eleanor Ediger, 19 June 1957.

4 Ediger to Clifford Wilson, 11 July 1957. Wilson to Ediger, 15 July 1957. See John Henry LEFROY, *In Search of the Magnetic North; A Soldier-Surveyor's Letters from the North-West 1843-1844*, ed. George F.G. Stanley (Toronto: Macmillan, 1955). The Berthon portrait was commissioned by the Royal Canadian Institute and is still in that collection.

5 Ediger to George Stanley, 16 Aug. 1957; Stanley to Ediger, 6 Sept. 1957.

6 Moncrieff Williamson to J. Russell Harper, 24 Jan. 1961.

7 Harper to Williamson, 8 Mar. 1961.

8 For Lefroy see Carol M. WHITFIELD and Richard A. JARRELL, *Dictionary of Canadian Biography* XI (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982): 508-10.

9 The letters are cited in J. Russell HARPER, *Paul Kane's Frontier* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971), 16-17.

10 CAVELL and REID, *When Winter was King*, 54.

11 Maria TIPPETT, *By a Lady; Celebrating Three Centuries of Art by Canadian Women* (Toronto: Viking, 1992), 9.

12 Repr. in TIPPETT, *By a Lady*, 10.

13 Pinney's Auctions, Montréal, 10 May 1984, lot S56, *Trapper and Dogs at an Indian Encampment*, where it was acquired by Michel Doyon. I first saw it with Doyon in 1993, and my understanding of the piece benefited from many conversations with him prior to his tragic death early in 1997. The painting is now titled *Northwestern Portrait*, c.1855.

14 The work is painted in oils, but with a water soluble toning layer that has been selectively removed to create design, particularly the smoke effects in the sky. The unusual glow overall probably is the result of an opaque red underpainting, similar to the "carnation" layer miniaturists traditionally used to underlay depictions of flesh. I am grateful to Sandra Webster-Cook, Conservator, Art Gallery of Ontario, for these observations.

15 For the *Belleau* see Mario BÉLAND, ed., *Painting in Quebec 1820-1850; New Views, New Perspectives* (Quebec: Musée du Québec, 1992), 481, repr. The *Oliver* can be seen only in a poor, cropped repr. in Eileen REID MARCIL, *The Charley-Man; A History of Wooden Shipbuilding at Quebec 1763-1893* (Kingston, Ont.: Quarry Press, 1995), 73.

16 The date of his move is bracketed by two documents: the baptismal record of his son, Joseph Charles, at the Cathedral of the Holy Trinity, Quebec City, 17 April 1853; the record of the death of his son, Robert Alexander, 2 October 1853, St. James Cathedral, Toronto, Cemetery Booklet of Death Notices, burial #2620, 4 October 1853. I am grateful to Mary Peate of Westlake Village, California for directing me to this information.

17 He refers to himself as an artist only at the beginning. The earliest advertising notice is in the *Globe*, 26 November 1853. Todd died 7 May 1866, recorded at St. James Cathedral, Toronto, Cemetery Booklet of Death Notices, burial #7547, 9 May 1866.

L'IDENTIFICATION D'UN TABLEAU PERDU (ET NON RETROUVÉ) DE PAUL KANE ET L'ATTRIBUTION À ROBERT C. TODD D'UNE ŒUVRE QUI LUI EST APPARENTÉE

Le présent article traite de la recherche que j'ai faite en 1987 sur un tableau non attribué dont le titre était alors *The Fur Trader* et qui se trouvait au musée Glenbow à Calgary. L'œuvre a été d'abord attribuée à Paul Kane puis, pendant plus de vingt-cinq ans, à Cornelius Krieghoff sans preuves solides. On peut maintenant dire que le tableau est fortement apparenté à une œuvre de Paul Kane, *Scene in the North West - Portrait*, qui fut montrée pour la première fois lors de l'exposition de la Toronto Society of Artists en avril 1847. Ce portrait du capitaine John Henry Lefroy du Royal Engineers rappelle son long périple dans les Territoires du Nord-Ouest en 1843-1844, au cours duquel il a pris une série considérable de relevés qui lui ont permis de fixer l'emplacement du nord magnétique. Il devint par la suite un membre important de la bonne société de Toronto, épousa la fille de John Beverley Robinson, juge en chef du Haut Canada en 1846, et encouragea le principal portraitiste de la ville, George Theodore Berthon. Lefroy participa à la fondation du Canadian (plus tard Royal Canadian) Institute en 1849, et en fut le premier vice-président en 1851-1852, et le président 1852-1853. Il retourna en Angleterre en avril 1853. Plus tôt, Lefroy avait écrit à Sir George Simpson, gouverneur de la Compagnie de la Baie d'Hudson, pour appuyer la demande de Paul Kane de voyager dans les Territoires du Nord-Ouest durant l'hiver de 1845-1846. C'est justement à ce moment que fut exécuté *Scene in the North-West - Portrait*.

Le portrait de Lefroy qui avait été exposé à Toronto en 1847 était encore, en 1987, entre les mains de ses descendants en Angleterre, mais on a depuis perdu sa trace. En comparaison, la version de Glenbow, traitée de manière conventionnelle et sans relief, a probablement été réalisée au moment où Lefroy quittait Toronto, en 1853, emportant l'original. C'était probablement, du moins en partie, l'œuvre de la nouvelle épouse de Kane, Harriet Clench, qui était elle-même peintre et qui travaillait avec Kane dans son studio. Il est aussi possible que le tableau de Glenbow soit une copie faite entièrement par Clench.

En 1984, un tableau qui s'apparentait beaucoup au portrait de Kane fit son apparition à Montréal dans une vente aux enchères. Bien qu'exécuté sur un

support plus petit, en bois, et selon une technique ordinairement associée à la peinture de miniatures, le personnage est placé dans le même cadre que le tableau de Kane. Il représente cependant un sujet différent, non identifié. Le tableau, qui se trouve maintenant dans la Art Gallery of Ontario, est connu sous le nom de *Northwestern Portrait* et daté vers 1855 pour souligner sa ressemblance avec l'œuvre de Kane. Le tableau de la Art Gallery of Ontario est attribué au peintre Robert Clow Todd, venu de Québec à Toronto à l'été de 1853. Cette attribution est suggérée par des comparaisons avec les portraits signés par Todd, en particulier celui de *Thomas Hamilton Olivier*, 1840. Si cette attribution est effectivement avérée, *Northwestern Portrait* serait la seule œuvre connue de Todd datant de sa période torontoise.

Traduction: Élise Bonnette