

PAUL KANE PAINTINGS REDISCOVERED*

Six Paul Kane oil paintings originally obtained from the artist by Sir George Simpson have recently been discovered in the collection of a Simpson descendant in Scotland. Simpson's great-great-grandson, a descendant through his daughter Margaret Mackenzie, inherited these works together with a few watercolours and a quantity of native Indian artifacts. The author's enquiries to the owner resulted in the discovery of the Kane paintings in a trunk, where they have lain for over a century.

Documents from the 1840's provide us with a provenance for the paintings. Evidence suggests that four of the group were part of Kane's major exhibition in Toronto in the fall of 1848, that they were painted while Kane was on his travels across North America, and that they formed part of a group of ten sent to Simpson in early 1849.

Sir George Simpson (fig. 1) was the Governor of the Hudson's Bay Company from 1820 to 1860. He may be considered Kane's first major patron. He was directly responsible for Kane's historic travels through Company territory to the west. On Sir George's authority, Kane obtained board, lodging and transportation for more than two years at Company expense. In a letter of 1847 Simpson wrote:

I should feel greatly obliged, if you would take for me some sketches of buffalo hunts, Indian camps, Councils, feats, Conjuring matches, dances, warlike exhibitions or any other scenes of savage life that you may consider likely to be attractive or interesting, with a view to their being colored and framed, and, of equal size so as to match each other. As you are likely to have a long winter before you, perhaps you could prepare a dozen and upon as large a scale in point of size as possible.¹

On January 3, 1849, Kane sent ten finished sketches with a covering letter to the Governor, in which he listed those sent and mentioned four to come later.²

*I wish to acknowledge the importance of Dr. J. Russell Harper's book *Paul Kane's Frontier*, (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1971), to my work. His thorough research prompted my interest in Paul Kane, and the book has served as a valued reference. Gratitude is also due to Dr. Helmuth Fuchs and to Ken Lister, Ethnology Division, Royal Ontario Museum, for information on paintings in that collection.

Simpson acknowledged receipt of these, and mentioned that he prized them very highly.³ Four of this group have now been located as is demonstrated by examination of the subject matter. These were painted while Kane was in the territory, for Kane's letter of October 22, 1848, nine days after his arrival home from his travels, noted that:

The sketches that I painted for you in the interior have got slightly injured, and I am at present repairing them and will send them down the first opportunity⁴

Kane included some of Simpson's works in his exhibition, which opened in Toronto's Old City Hall on November 9, 1848. A review of the exhibition stated:

some very beautiful sketches... of scenery on the western prairies, some of which, we are informed, have been requested by Sir George Simpson, than whom there must not be a better judge of the fidelity of Mr. Kane's pencil.⁵

Four of the sketches just found have numbers on the back, in pencil, which correspond to entries in the catalogue of the 1848 exhibition.⁶ All four are subjects listed by Kane as sent to Simpson in January 1849 shortly after Kane's exhibition had closed.

All the newly uncovered works are oil on paper, of very similar size. The four apparently done for the commission, and exhibited in 1848 are on heavy paper, 13¾ by 8½ inches in size. The other two are on lighter, sketch-pad paper, 13½ by 8½ inches. The works had been in a damp enclosed environment and consequently displayed surface mould, a condition which has since been corrected. All six are finished pictures, painted with Kane's characteristic palette of clear brown, blue, grey and green pigments with occasional colour accents. Paint coverage is fluid, with few heavily impasted areas. The paintings display Kane's sure brushwork and a more spontaneous technique than in the later studio canvases, but there is also awkward handling of human anatomy and moving animals.

The quality and subject matter of the works makes them of great interest, though none are completely unknown to Kane scholars. None are intimate character studies, rather, they are panoramic views painted by an observer, not a participant. This detachment accords with the artist's professed intention to record the manners and customs



fig. 1. Stephen PEARCE, *Sir George Simpson*, ca. 1856, oil on canvas, 55¼" x 43⅞". (Photo courtesy: Hudson's Bay Company, Winnipeg)

fig. 2. Paul KANE, *Indian Summer on the Saskatchewan*, ca. 1846, oil on paper, 8⅝" x 13¾". (Photo: Hugh Dodd Fine Art, Edinburgh)



fig. 3. Paul KANE, *A Buffalo Pound*, ca. 1846, oil on paper, 8⅝" x 13⅞". (Photo: Hugh Dodd Fine Art, Edinburgh)

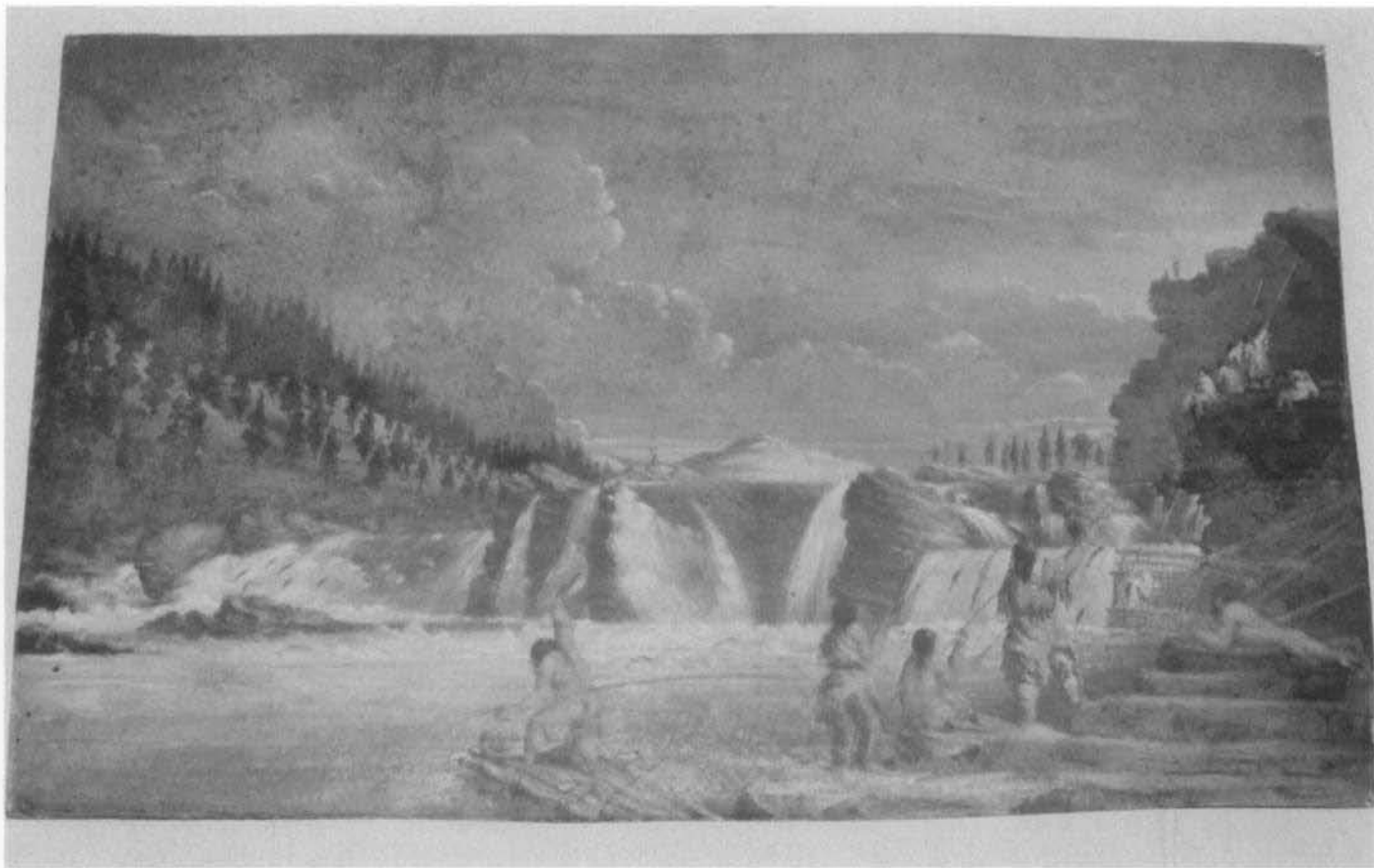


fig. 4. Paul KANE, *Catching Salmon on the Falls Near Colville, Columbia River*, ca. 1847, oil on paper, 8½" x 14".
(Photo: Hugh Dodd Fine Art, Edinburgh)



fig. 5. Paul KANE, *Castle Rock, Columbia River*, ca. 1847, oil on paper, 8½" x 13¾". (Photo: Hugh Dodd Fine Art, Edinburgh)



fig. 6. Paul KANE, *Metis Chasing a Buffalo Herd*, ca. 1846, oil on paper, 8½" x 13½".
(Photo: Hugh Dodd Fine Art, Edinburgh)



fig. 7. Paul KANE, *Metis Encampment*, ca. 1846, oil on paper,
8½" x 13½". (Photo: Hugh Dodd Fine Art, Edinburgh)

of the Indians and the scenery of the country.⁷ Through study of his sketches, however, we are aware of his editorial eye. The works have been carefully composed, but appear to be more faithful records of nature than were later canvases. They are probably the first oil paintings done of each subject, and are in that sense experimental. They may be placed at the junction of his interest in accuracy and what he saw as the demands of art. In these pictures, Kane's interest is in the form and detail of landscape elements. The views display his emphasis on depth of canvas space and a broad horizon, which permits his virtuosity in treatment of clouds and sky. Weather becomes a subject of the work, to add variety, drama and balance to a composition.

Indian Summer on the Saskatchewan (fig. 2), has the numeral 57 in pencil on the reverse, corresponding to the subject *Saskatchewan River* in the catalogue of Kane's 1848 exhibition, a subject included among other illustrations depicting buffalo. Kane's covering letter sent with the sketches to Sir George Simpson on January 3, 1849 listed a work described as "a sketch on the Saskatchewan" as number eight of the ten delivered.⁸ The Royal Ontario Museum owns a large oil on canvas entitled *Indian Summer on the Saskatchewan*, which differs in only minor respects from the sketch recently found. Both versions appear to be based on pencil studies of buffalo groups.⁹ The subject is described by Kane in *The Wanderings of an Artist*. He wrote on September 14, 1846:

Towards Evening, as we were approaching the place where we were to cross the river, I saw some buffaloes idly grazing in a valley, and as I wished to give a general idea of the beauty of the scenery which lies all along the banks of the Saskatchewan from this point to Edmonton, I sat down to make a sketch, the rest of the party promising to wait for me at the crossing place. It was the commencement of Indian summer; the evening was very fine, and threw that peculiar soft warm haziness over the landscape, which is supposed to proceed from the burning of the immense prairies. The sleepy buffaloes grazing upon the undulating hills, here and there relieved by clumps of small trees, the unbroken stillness, and the approaching evening, rendered it altogether a scene of most enchanting repose.¹⁰

This work particularly captures the orange glow of the evening sky, conveying accurately the sense of peacefulness Kane felt. The escarp-

ment in the distance defines the breadth of the prairie, the groups of rolling hills provide a sense of rhythm and draw the eye toward the buffalo in the centre of the canvas. Compositionally the animal groupings differ in the two oils, but in neither case are they the main theme. They add interest to his depiction of a striking landscape and the atmosphere of repose which he experienced.

A second buffalo subject (fig. 3), has the numeral 58 in pencil on the reverse. The number corresponds to a subject described as *A buffalo Pound* in the 1848 exhibition catalogue. The first painting in the list of ten delivered to Sir George Simpson in January 1849 is *A buffalo pound*. A great many similarities may be found between this work and an oil on canvas known by the same title from the Hon. G. W. Allan Collection, now in the Royal Ontario Museum.¹¹ Both paintings appear to be based on a series of studies resulting from Kane's observation of a buffalo hunt near Fort Carleton. He described this event in his *Wanderings...* noting that it occurred on September 12, 1846. Kane explained how the enclosure was constructed and the means by which the buffalo were coaxed to enter, adding that "whilst the buffaloes were being driven in, the scene was certainly exciting and picturesque; but that the slaughter in the enclosure was more painful than pleasing."¹²

Kane's illustration of this subject will interest the student of ethnology, for it coincides with his description of the configuration of the pound and the methods of capture as well as the spiritual significance of the rites which accompany the capture. The "dead men" waving buffalo robes, and the mounted hunter who controls the buffalo may be clearly seen in both the oil sketch and the large canvas in the Royal Ontario Museum. The ROM canvas more clearly depicts the Indian with a feathered pipe in a tree in the centre of the pound, intended to "propitiate the Great Spirit to direct the herd towards it."¹³

The new painting and pencil studies for the later oil both feature coniferous trees, although the ROM painting depicts deciduous trees. Another sketch, completed while Kane was in Italy, accords more closely to the tree in the ROM oil. In this manner, Kane reorganized what he saw to make it compatible with his European notion of landscape. This tree stands physically and symbolically isolated from the central grove. When considered with the brilliant colour of the clouded sky, one experiences a sense of time suspended and the unfolding of a momentous event. The composition is more vibrant in the new picture than in the ROM oil. The groupings of trees recede towards the horizon, the rolling landscape is emphasized, whereas the ROM canvas is strongly centralized and completely balanced by the creation of a valley with a grove of trees which draw the eye to one subject, the buffalo

pound. The work gains immediacy because the buffalo herd is less regular in form, and the action of the animals less mannered.

Two Columbia river fishing scenes were in the group of newly found Kane sketches. Fig. 4, which has the number 74 on the reverse, is listed in the 1848 Exhibition Catalogue as *Catching Salmon on the Falls Near Colville, Columbia River*. *Catching Salmon at Colville* is the title of the third painting of ten Simpson received from Kane in January 1849. The same location is described as *Kettle Falls* in an oil on paper work of the same size now in the Stark Collection.¹⁴ The *Kettle Falls* version is a study of the waterfall itself, in which the Indians at the weir add interest, but are not the focus of the painting. One other oil on canvas of this subject, larger in scale, is known although numerous watercolours and pencil studies exist: *Falls at Colville*, formerly in the collection of George Allan and now in the ROM, is almost identical to the new version. Kane would have had an opportunity to observe the Indians fishing, and make sketches on this theme, while at Fort Colville in August and September of 1847. In his book he described their methods and the importance of salmon fishing to the natives.¹⁵

Fig. 4 and *Falls at Colville* are dramatic and ethnologically rich works. In the later ROM oil Kane has manipulated the landscape elements of the composition, opening the canvas and adding greater depth by moving the grassy hill in the distance behind the falls until it relates to the rock formation on the right, a departure from the features shown in a watercolour study now in the Stark Collection. This change was not entirely successful, for it creates a "valley effect" drawing the eye to the horizon and out of the canvas, part of Kane's stock compositional vocabulary. Another change was to omit the two romantic figures on the rock outcropping, framed against the sky, elements which bear testimony to his artistic heritage.

The treatment of the figure groups in both pictures is exceptional. Compositionally the effect is rich and varied. Details of costume have been carefully rendered without sacrificing the easy handling. The figures themselves are convincing, though not always well proportioned. The attitudes of the figures, particularly in the uppermost group, betray Kane's adherence to academic artistic traditions. Kane's preparatory studies for this view include details of the man with club, the lower and upper figure groups and the falls without figures, (all watercolours), in the Stark Collection, as well as pencil drawings in the ROM. However, Kane often used the same elements and figures in many different works. This has complicated our determination of the locale of origin of some subjects. His fishing illustrations are a case in point. Attention to detail in fig. 4 is remarkable. Especially intriguing are a man in the

wooden platform and one figure and a canoe in centre background. Fig. 5 has #75 written in pencil on the reverse. That number is identified in the 1848 Exhibition Catalogue as *Castle Rock, Columbia River*. A great deal of confusion has resulted from the erroneous attribution of this title, at some later date, to a pair of rocks near Walla Walla. These Kane knew by a variety of titles, notably as the Chimney Rocks, and he described them in detail in the *Wanderings*....¹⁶ An oil on canvas from George Allan's collection depicting Chimney Rocks is the cause of the error.¹⁷

Kane's landscape log and some early descriptions of the rock make it evident that the single rock in the newly discovered painting was what he meant as Castle Rock. Item 91 in the log is "The Grand Prairie and big rock some call the Castle".¹⁸ The fifth subject of the ten Kane sent Simpson in January 1849 was *Castle Rock on the Columbia River*.¹⁹ Both Lewis and Clark, and Rev. Samuel Parker describe the rock in detail. Their descriptions accord with Kane's depiction. Considerable variation in name existed even then; Parker, in the mid 1830's, knew it as Pillar Rock. A modern photo calls it Beacon Rock. E. S. Meany, in 1923, summarized the question when he wrote "Lewis and Clark gave the name of 'Beacon Rock' to a large rock in the lower Columbia River. It was later called Pillar Rock and often goes by the name of Castle Rock."²⁰

Two works are known to be related to *Castle Rock* (fig. 5)²¹ The water-colour sketch, known as *Below the Cascades, Indian Fishing on the Columbia River* captures the main elements of the scene, establishing proportion and emphasis. The landscape is the main theme and is freely handled. The grandeur of the mountains complements rather than diminishes the impact of Castle Rock. In fig. 5, a seated Indian figure rests on the rock, patterns of light and shade activate the work, and the reflection of rocks and clouds in the river is particularly effective. A subtle balance between two themes is created, the anecdotal one of two figures fishing and the descriptive one of a monumental element of landscape. In the third version, an oil on canvas formerly in G. W. Allan's collection, the dimension of the landscape is less emphasized. Attention is focused on the foreground; a figure grouping and Indians in canoes have been added. The seated figure of the earlier oil appears on the foreground rocks, which have been altered to accept this configuration.

These works demonstrate very clearly the process involved in Kane's painting. One cannot rely on the later canvases for historical accuracy. For example, in this work the bark canoe on the left has been taken from a page of studies done further north and the figures are idealized.

The two remaining Kane paintings, oils of nearly similar size to the other four, are on lighter-weight paper. We have no evidence to indicate when they were sent to Simpson. Probably they formed part of the works listed in the inventory, taken on his death, as "a lot of pictures, Sketches in the Indian Country by Paul Kane and others, valued at two dollars the lot."²² The subject matter of the works does not conform to any listed as delivered by Kane in January 1849 or to be sent later. This suggests that Simpson owned more Kane oil sketches than a total of fourteen.

Metis Chasing a Buffalo Herd, (fig. 6) may be a picture discussed in two items of correspondence from 1846 and 1847. Robert Cluston mentioned, in a letter to Kane, that Simpson would like a side view of the buffalo hunt, to match the one he already had.²³ Simpson himself wrote Kane, saying: "In taking the sketch of the buffalo hunt you were good enough to send me last year, you must have stood in the rear of the herd; a side view would have given a better idea of the appearance of the animals...."²⁴ It seems quite possible that this view, in which the buffalo are indistinct, was later augmented by *Half Breeds Running Buffalo*, an oil on canvas once owned by Simpson. The painting which has just been found could thus be dated 1846, when Kane observed the buffalo hunts at Red River and described them in the *Wanderings*....²⁵

Two other views of this subject are known. There is an unfinished oil on paper, similar in size to the painting in fig. 6, in the Stark Collection.²⁶ This was probably an early attempt. There is also a water-colour, signed and dated 1846, entitled *Halfbreeds Running Buffalo*. This is very similar to the newly found painting, although there are more buffalo, they are rather indistinct, and the disposition of the hunters is somewhat less stylized than in the oil. Like fig. 6, this version takes on something of the character of an English hunting scene, since the composition is rendered lively by the rhythm of the figures; Kane's habit of depicting moving animals as fully extended gives the scene a sense of suspended motion, as if photographed, rather than one of reality. The painting illustrated in fig. 6 is signed, and appears to have been torn out of a sketchbook. This oil was executed in a very spare manner, the paint very thin, except where costume details have been accented with bright colour.

Fig. 7 is a subject from the same approximate location. A number of different versions of this subject exist. Kane followed the camp rather closely; views of the Metis travelling on the prairie and of the process of setting up camp are known, as well as his written description of the Indian carts and "lodges formed of dressed buffalo skins."²⁷ A pencil sketch of carts and dwellings may be found in the Royal Ontario

Museum as well as a watercolour sketch in the Stark Collection. Fig. 7 is based on a number of others, not all of which have been identified.²⁸ A comparable version is an oil on canvas, *Halfbreed Encampment*, from George Allan's collection, now in the ROM. It provides many different details, including a pond and groups of cows in the foreground, which give a pastoral appearance but, with their Northern European precedents, detract from the immediacy and documentary value of the work. The new oil is not devoid of this tendency — a woman in robe has been added to the composition, and an elegant horse grazes in the foreground. The work has an intense quality, created by attention to small details and the repetition of some elements; for instance the rows of tents marching off to the horizon. The same feeling is also noticed in fig. 6. In fig. 7, the hum of activity within the camp is balanced by the broad stretch of azure sky. The scene is an inviting one, but Kane seems to have limited our participation by the unconvincing bushes in the left foreground, a compositional problem which he solved in the ROM canvas by adding the pond.

The discovery of these paintings focuses attention on a fascinating mid-nineteenth century collector, Sir George Simpson. They provide tangible evidence of the relationship between two men of initiative from our frontier period. The implication that other significant items from Simpson's collection may yet be identified is indeed intriguing. Although we do not know the number of Kane's works that Simpson acquired, there were larger oils on canvas as well as the quantity of smaller works on paper.²⁹ These paintings are an important part of Canada's artistic heritage, being early oil sketches of considerable vitality. In addition, four were apparently the result of Kane's first commission for scenes from the frontier and were exhibited to acclaim in 1848. Finally, they formed part of the collection of Sir George Simpson, a major figure in British North America.

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Notes:

- ¹ Sir George SIMPSON to Paul Kane, n.d. (1847), Kane Family Papers. Cited in HARPER, *Paul Kane's Frontier* (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1971), p. 330.
- ² Paul KANE to Sir George Simpson, January 3, 1849, D5/24 fo. 16, Hudson's Bay Company Archives, Winnipeg. The list is printed by HARPER, *Paul Kane's Frontier*, Appendix 4, p. 320.
- ³ Sir George SIMPSON to Paul Kane, January 19, 1849, Kane Family Papers. Cited in HARPER, *Paul Kane's Frontier*, p. 332.
- ⁴ Paul KANE to Sir George Simpson, October 22, 1848, D5/23 fo. 125, Hudson's Bay Company Archives, Winnipeg.
- ⁵ Hugh SCOBIE, "Kane's Indian Gallery," *British Colonist*, November 17, 1848.
- ⁶ SCOBIE and BALFOUR, *Catalogue of Sketches of Indians, and Indian Chiefs, Landscapes, Dances, Costumes &c, &c*, by Paul Kane (Toronto: November 1848). Cited by HARPER, *Paul Kane's Frontier*, Appendix 3, p. 317.
- ⁷ Paul KANE, *The Wanderings of an Artist*, in HARPER, *Paul Kane's Frontier*, p. 51.
- ⁸ Paul KANE to Sir George Simpson, January 3, 1849, D5/24, fo. 16, Hudson's Bay Company Archives, Winnipeg.
- ⁹ Kane's finished works and studies which apparently relate to this subject include IV-170, IV-240, IV-166, IV-167, IV-168, IV-165. Listed here, and subsequently in the order introduced in the text; catalogue numbers pertain to Dr. Harper's catalogue raisonné, *Paul Kane's Frontier*.
- ¹⁰ *Ibid*, p. 80.
- ¹¹ IV-101. II-6 shows a similar deciduous tree. Studies related to *A Buffalo Pound* include IV-99, IV-97, IV-100 and potentially IV-98.
- ¹² *Ibid*, p. 79.
- ¹³ *Ibid*.
- ¹⁴ *Kettle Falls* IV-298, *Falls at Colville* IV-307, Watercolour Study IV-299. Details: IV-306, IV-304, IV-305, IV-300-303 inclusive.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid*, pp. 123-124.
- ¹⁶ *Ibid*, p. 113.
- ¹⁷ IV-361.
- ¹⁸ HARPER, *Paul Kane's Frontier*, Appendix I, p. 314. An entry listed immediately before Fort Walla Walla (where the Chimney Rocks, or Two Captains as they have been called, are located) mentioned: #97 The rocks of the two Cransgeeves near Walla Walla.
- ¹⁹ Paul KANE to Sir George Simpson, January 3, 1849, D5/24 fo. 16, Hudson's Bay Company Archives, Winnipeg.
- ²⁰ Literature concerning this question may be found in: Merriwether LEWIS, *History of the Expedition Under the Command of Lewis and Clark*, ed. Elliott Coues, 4 vols. (New York: Francis P. Harper, 1893), Vol. 2, p. 688; Vol. 3, p. 939. Edmond S. MEANY, *Origin of Washington Geographic Names* (Seattle: Univ. of Washington Press, 1923), p. 40. Rev. Samuel PARKER, *Journal of an Exploring Tour Beyond the Rocky Mountains... 1835, '36, '37*, 2nd ed. (Ithaca, N.Y.: Mack, Andrus and Woodruff, 1840) p. 143. Archie SATTERFIELD, *Moods of the Columbia* (Seattle: Superior Pub. Co., 1968), p. 23.
- ²¹ Watercolour, *Below the Cascades...* IV-388, oil on canvas IV-356.
- ²² Inventory of the estate of the late Sir George Simpson, Nov. 24, 1869, I. J. Gibb, Notary, fo. 4, Archives nationales du Québec, Montréal.
- ²³ Robert CLUSTON to Paul Kane, December 15, 1846, in HARPER, *Paul Kane's Frontier*, p. 332.
- ²⁴ Sir George SIMPSON to Paul Kane, n.d. (1847), Kane Family Papers. Cited in HARPER, *Paul Kane's Frontier*, p. 330.
- ²⁵ Paul KANE, *The Wanderings of an Artist*, in HARPER, *Paul Kane's Frontier*, p. 71. These possibilities have been noted by Dr. Harper, who mentioned that the work sent to Simpson was "now lost" (p. 38). See also the notes for paintings IV-73 and IV-74 in Harper's catalogue raisonné.
- ²⁶ Oil on paper IV-72, watercolour IV-71.
- ²⁷ Paul KANE, *The Wanderings of an Artist*, in HARPER, *Paul Kane's Frontier*, p. 69. Some of these views, in the ROM, are IV-54, IV-63, IV-55 and IV-64.
- ²⁸ IV-68 is directly comparable. Other aspects of the camp include IV-69, IV-66, IV-67 and IV-65.
- ²⁹ Clifford WILSON, "Early Western Paintings," *The Beaver*, 280 (June 1949), pp. 12-13.

RÉSUMÉ

On vient de découvrir en Écosse six esquisses à l'huile réalisées par le peintre Paul Kane, dans la collection privée d'un descendant de leur premier propriétaire, Sir George Simpson.

Quand il mourut en 1860, Sir Simpson était administrateur de la Compagnie de la Baie d'Hudson du Canada. Grâce à lui, Paul Kane effectua d'illustres voyages sur le territoire de la Compagnie. M. Simpson lui avait commandé un certain nombre de croquis dont quatre, apparemment, correspondent à ceux que l'on vient de trouver, du moins si on en compare les sujets avec une liste des oeuvres que Kane livra à Sir Simpson en 1849.

Quatre des oeuvres portent au verso un numéro qui correspond à des titres figurant à l'exposition de Paul Kane à l'Hôtel de ville de Toronto, en 1848. On peut facilement imaginer qu'elles faisaient effectivement partie de l'exposition.

Ces oeuvres sont des huiles sur papier d'environ 8½" sur 13½" dont les sujets n'étonneront aucun des spécialistes de Kane. Il s'agit néanmoins d'oeuvres qui, pour être achevées, n'en diffèrent pas moins, par les détails de la composition et la spontanéité, d'autres toiles de l'artiste exécutées par la suite à partir de mêmes thèmes. Ces croquis nous en disent long sur les méthodes de travail du peintre qui révèle sa tendance à manipuler les éléments en vue d'obtenir un effet artistique. Cela donne des toiles qui semblent présenter des anomalies historiques et, dans certains cas même, apparaissent nettement gauches ou artificielles si on les compare à des croquis réalisés sur le vif.

Trois indices: une lettre de Kane à Sir Simpson, la livraison rapide des oeuvres et une date figurant sur l'une d'elles laissent supposer que l'artiste a réalisé les croquis à un moment où il se trouvait encore sur le territoire de la Compagnie.

Dans toutes ses nouvelles oeuvres, à l'exception de *Scene on the Saskatchewan*, où l'on voit un groupe de bisons au repos, Kane s'est attaché à deux thèmes principaux, juxtaposant avec bonheur la description du paysage avec l'illustration anecdotique de certains aspects de la vie des Amérindiens. L'ensemble présente un certain détachement: le spectateur n'est jamais invité à participer à la scène. Néanmoins, les pièces restent fascinantes par le sujet et par la qualité. Deux d'entre elles représentent des scènes d'Indiens pêchant sur le fleuve Columbia et à Castle Rock; une troisième montre un campement de Métis. Les autres dépeignent la chasse et la capture de bisons. Toutes sans exception témoignent du talent que possédait Paul Kane pour saisir et représenter les us et coutumes des indigènes.

La découverte de ces six huiles permet d'escompter celle d'autres oeuvres appartenant à la collection originale de Sir Simpson. Comme deux des peintures en question ne font pas partie des 14 qu'était censé posséder M. Simpson, il est impossible de dénombrer sa collection avec exactitude. Une liste de ses biens, établie à sa mort, fait état de nombreux croquis mais il n'est nulle part fait mention de toiles. Pour finir, l'Université Yale possède quatre toiles de Kane réputées appartenir à la collection Simpson, ce qui n'est pas pour simplifier les choses!

Si l'on en juge par les croquis récemment découverts, la collaboration entre Paul Kane et son premier client important a permis à des oeuvres majeures de voir le jour.

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