

William H. Eagar:

Drawing Master of Argyle Street, Halifax



fig. 1 Possibly J.S. CLOW (act. c. 1830-1850). William Eagar.
Photograph of unlocated miniature. (Photo: Nova Scotia Museum.)

There were few communities in British North America during the early decades of the nineteenth century that could claim a professional resident artist and teacher, and fewer still a landscape specialist. Transient painters continued to fill the demand for family memorabilia of the living and dead, while the majority of North American scenes were produced for foreign military personnel. William H. Eagar (1796-1839) (fig.1) resided in Newfoundland and Nova Scotia, practising art professionally for only one decade, from 1829 to 1839. His influence can be judged factually by the

success of his Academy and students, and speculatively by the vicarious appreciation pupils, associates and countrymen gained for the “new” art of landscape.

Eagar’s versatile career parallels the experience of other colonial artists involved with cultural pursuits in British North America.¹ Born in Ireland in 1796 to a family with landed ancestry, Eagar would have learned how to draw as part of the classical education appropriate for boys of his station. He may have immigrated to Newfoundland to work as a fishery agent rather than an artist. His marriage in St. John’s in 1819 to Maria Saunders, daughter of an establishment family, was reported in the local press.

The economic depression of the 1820’s terminated many Newfoundland businesses and possibly obliged Eagar to labour as a painter and glazier, a common occupation for pioneers with artistic aptitude during times of economic distress. He experienced a short-term bankruptcy in 1821 while engaged in these endeavours, but rapid settlement of his debts indicates he had access to considerable financial reserves, either from his own or his wife’s family.

When Eagar opened a studio in St. John’s at the Old London Theatre in 1829, offering profile silhouettes and landscape lessons, he was the owner of a sizeable plantation, Spring Field. Located at Riverhead, the fashionable area on the outskirts of town, this farm with a cottage and half of its twenty acres under cultivation was a sizeable estate. Governor Thomas Cochrane commissioned Eagar to draw an up-to-date view of St. John’s in 1831 to strengthen an island petition for colonial status. Eagar travelled to England that winter to oversee the engraving process of this strategic print.

Impressed by the work of leading watercolour painters he found in London, “Seat of the Arts,” he intended teaching landscape exclusively upon his return. Apparently he found little interest in St. John’s for the “new” branch of art. When the prestigious, high-salaried position of Surveyor General for the island became vacant, Eagar applied but was refused because others were better qualified. Thereafter he vacated his schoolroom and advertised his specialty as “portrait painting in oil and water colour.”

Eagar established a Drawing Academy in Halifax in 1834, where he served as drawing master to daughters of leading families who believed art was a necessary accomplishment of a first-class education. Few patrons purchased watercolour scenery, so to supplement his teaching income Eagar managed a commission warehouse, the Halifax Bazaar. An editorial by Joseph Howe acknowledged him as the town’s foremost landscape artist and

complimented his teaching as being “efficient.” The artist was actively involved in his community: he lectured at the popular Mechanic’s Institute, constructed a spectacular illuminated design for Queen Victoria’s coronation celebration, organized a major art exhibition and expanded his classes to include “young men and others who might obtain facilities not now possessed.”

Eagar’s most ambitious plan, announced in 1836, was to publish at least two volumes of engraved views of Nova Scotia and New Brunswick. He had also hoped to include scenery of Upper Canada, the entire compilation to be known as *The British North American Tourist*. If Eagar had succeeded with his task as he had originally planned it, he would have anticipated by some half dozen years William Bartlett’s *Canadian Scenery Illustrated*. Competition from a similar work, *Sketches of Nova Scotia* by Robert Petley, lithographed and less expensive, discouraged sales of Eagar’s first number, issued in 1837 as *Landscape Illustrations of Nova Scotia*. Without recourse to government assistance to subsidize subsequent engravings, Eagar learned lithography and drew his twelve remaining Nova Scotian scenes on stone. The last two numbers of *Nova Scotia Scenery* appeared after his death at Halifax in November 1839.

Eagar first opened his “rooms” as an artist in St. John’s, October 1829, believing there was more demand for likenesses than for art lessons.² His offer to teach landscape was merely a postscript at the bottom of his notice. His position as sole artist in St. John’s was shortly challenged when William Valentine of Halifax arrived in town to paint portraits and silhouettes.³ The cultural market by then was large enough to support both artists for a time. Competition forced the two to share artistic production, Eagar making silhouettes and giving art lessons, Valentine painting miniatures and portraits. Valentine remained until June, 1830.⁴

Eagar’s penchant for teaching was fortified by his London visit in 1831.⁵ He was intrigued by the growing popularity and prevalent taste for scenic watercolours; in England, landscape painting was very much in vogue. He must have been disappointed with his attempt to stimulate a similar interest for landscape lessons in St. John’s. Within six months he gave up his schoolroom and reverted to painting portraits.⁶

In order to teach art full-time, Eagar realized it was necessary to settle in a larger, more sophisticated centre. Could the fact that he met Valentine in St. John’s and a second time in 1834 shortly before the Eagar family left the island⁷ have influenced Eagar’s decision? In Halifax, he recommenced his teaching career as proprietor of Mr. Eagar’s Drawing Academy.⁸

He wasted no time obtaining suitable premises for his Drawing Academy in a prime location from which to advertise his services to his new community. Situated on Barrington Street, one of the busiest Halifax thoroughfares, Eagar's rooms were next door to the Eastern Stage Coach depot and the adjoining lodging house operated by Alex Paul, the company agent.⁹ Mr. Eagar's establishment was a welcome diversion for travellers with idle time to fill, as leisure moments might be occupied examining samples of the artist's work.

Eagar's enthusiasm for his new venture had a rude shock. The town was in the midst of a province-wide economic depression. Joseph Howe, editor of the *Novascotian*, reported that the capital's trade during the previous nine months "had been in a state of great languor and disarrangement, and at times of almost total stagnation."¹⁰ In spite of hard times, Eagar continued to teach his lessons and was able to move his Academy and family to a more dignified location in the most fashionable residential area of town, near the Methodist Chapel on Argyle Street and overlooking the Grand Parade. The address of the Academy was well-known: Eagar's neighbours, the Misses Morris, proprietors of a ladies' seminary, identified their location as "nearly opposite the Old Methodist Chapel and one door north from Mr. Eagar's Drawing Academy."¹¹

Eagar initially advertised his skill as a landscape artist, teacher and portrait painter. There is no evidence his instruction excluded portraiture, although one of his students, Ellen Nutting, did delightful watercolour studies of Halifax acquaintances. Competition from Valentine at this time probably discouraged Eagar from seeking portrait commissions, for there is no mention of this service in any of his subsequent notices.¹² In his first Halifax advertisement, he described the specific method of painting he would endeavour to teach:

... rudiments of LANDSCAPE PAINTING and effect ... the present style of Water Colour painting, so generally admired by all lovers of the fine arts, and so much practised by Prout, Stanfield, Robson, DeWint, Hunt, Cristal, and many other eminent Artists of the English School.¹³

Obviously Eagar was patterning his teaching on the paintings of these individuals. His London journey had opened his eyes to current aesthetic theories and stylistic interpretations fashionable in England; in Halifax he believed there was a receptive audience anxious to share his discoveries.

When Eagar returned to England in 1831, he must have been startled by the advance of watercolour painting which had taken place since his

departure for Newfoundland the previous decade. A changing attitude towards art and nature had resulted from the introduction, during the interval, of picturesque principles then applied to landscape gardening. This philosophy had been outlined by a number of writers in the 1790's: Archibald Alison, Richard Payne Knight, Udeval Price. But the most influential had been the Reverend William Gilpin, a vicar and amateur artist at Boldre, New Forest, in Hampshire. Between 1782 and 1809, eight books by Gilpin had spread his theories of picturesque landscape and had provided guidelines for their application. William Eagar and his pupils were familiar with Gilpin. Two sketches after Gilpin by an Academy student were entered in the 1838 Halifax exhibition.¹⁴ Gilpin's ideas were adaptable to Eagar's teaching in the colony. Gilpin is said to have directed British eyes to see the scenery of their own country;¹⁵ William Eagar wished to do the same for Nova Scotia. in his advertisement Eagar evokes the names of Joshua Cristall (c. 1767-1847), Samuel Prout (1783-1852) and William Clarkson Stanfield (1794-1867).¹⁶

A possible explanation for Eagar's choice is revealed by examining the themes favoured by the six artists. Each specialized in different subject matter. Eagar wanted his clients to know his qualifications for giving instruction were as broad as the various whims of his students. If mountain scenery stirred the fancy, he would guide a student to the practice of Robson; rustic figures in a landscape background, the work of Cristall; or still life with fruit and flowers, the manner of Hunt. DeWint had popularized a wide, panoramic format of landscape composition, while Prout took delight in architectural renderings. Stanfield was essentially a marine painter. The only indication of Eagar's personal preference rests on slim evidence: he made a copy of *Stangate Creek*, from the original by Stanfield.¹⁷

It is possible to speculate about the kind of instruction Eagar gave his students by examining the principles governing the nineteenth-century practices of landscape painting in general, and the works produced by both the teacher and his pupils. Eagar's teaching task was probably two-fold: he would have guided some students to copy engraved examples of artists' work along with some of his own specimens, and have helped them to "see" features of the landscape in terms of the picturesque. Imitating the work of famous painters had always been a traditional method of apprenticeship, but in the nineteenth century this procedure assumed additional importance. Spectators' eyes had to be trained in what to observe, only artists (and poets) having the necessary inborn qualifications.

By offering to teach techniques used by Prout and the others, Eagar was

no different from provincial artists instructing in British centres overseas. Style was considered a particular procedure one could learn to reproduce in a given number of lessons.¹⁸ Each session, students watched the master complete one stage of a drawing, then proceeded to emulate his progress and technique. If a novice had difficulty executing a particular passage, the teacher was expected to remedy the problem with his own hand. Theoretically, when the student's transcription was completed, the apprentice had acquired a "style." Few artists felt sufficiently confident to promote their own style exclusively, if at all.

Artists, if they had time, made their own student "patterns." Otherwise, the pupil relied on prints and drawings assembled by the teacher, formed his own collection, or resorted to illustrated publications. Eagar had some examples of his own work, and may have owned some originals purchased in London. The latest travel books and a selection of individual engravings were available to Academy students. An 1838 catalogue from the Halifax art exhibition organized by Eagar provides information about the students and their choice of subject.¹⁹ Mrs. Ritchie copied a scene from the *Waverley Novels*, illustrated by Cattermole, which had been sold in the capital within months of publication in 1835. Another popular edition, *Fisher's Drawing-room Scrapbook*, inspired a drawing by Mrs. Carroll. *Sentiment of Flowers* and *Woodland Gleanings*, both by the same author, and *The Romance of Nature: or the Flower Seasons Illustrated* by Louisa Anne Twamley were helpful for practice drawings of flora and fauna. The taste for keepsake annuals was evident in Halifax as elsewhere in the 1830's. These gift items, forerunners of today's date-books and almanacs, were small volumes with prints and verses appropriate to the changing calendar and were illustrated by notable artists.

Annuals encouraged enthusiasm for landscape as well as for other genres. Although issued late in the year for the Christmas market, they did not arrive in Halifax until several months later. Belcher's bookstore announced the arrival of "Splendid English Annuals for 1837 — just received from Liverpool." Included in the selection were *Heath's*, *Jennings'*, *The Picturesque* and *Oriental Annual*. Individual engravings of sporting, racing and caricature themes, as well as art supplies, might also be purchased from the same firm.

Eagar prepared his own views of local scenery to demonstrate picturesque possibilities of the immediate surroundings to his class. To what extent he encouraged original compositions by his students is not clear. Most of their exhibited paintings are either copies of European prints or unidentified copies

of their teacher's scenes. Possibly some, whose names are unknown, did attempt their own interpretations (*Belmont, North West Arm, View of Three Mile House, A View near the Dockyard*) although these, too, may have been inspired by Eagar sketches. Eagar may have taken his class on field trips, to discuss picturesque aspects of a particular spot before putting them down on paper. David Cox (1783-1859), an English artist and drawing master, believed this method was most productive:

The best and surest method of obtaining instruction from the work of others is not so much by copying them, as by drawing the same subjects from Nature immediately after a critical examination of them, while they are still fresh in the memory.²⁰

Sketches were taken home or back to the Academy to be worked into finished paintings. There was no scarcity of art supplies in Halifax; several shops carried the basic requirements: canvas, paper and paint, but C.H. Belcher specialized in "Materials of every description for Drawing, Painting, etc., in water and oil colours."²¹ A list of these products regularly occupied a full column in the *Novascotian*. Plain "tickens" or canvas prepared with oil ground could be purchased in widths from twenty-seven to forty-five inches. There was a choice of round and flat brushes of sable, camel or badger hair for applying "Bladder pigments" or Newman's watercolour cakes. Special effects in oil painting might be obtained by mixing pigment with various media: varnishes, oils, shellacs, asphaltum, McGuelp and Gumption. A large assortment of pencils, crayons, stumps of charcoal and ink were sold for use with drawing papers of the finest quality.

Notations on Eagar's engravings state, "drawn from nature," a practice he must have stressed in his Academy. This was a misleading term in that it did not involve making an exact representation of a specific scene as it appeared to the eye. An exact copy, Gilpin felt, could scarcely ever be beautiful, "but the artist who worked from his imagination, culling a distance here, and there a foreground, will probably make [a] much better landscape."²² The procedure described by Gilpin was to compose a fictitious, ideal view with selected objects, trees, rocks, etc., sketched previously on location and compiled into an album for later reference.²³ Specific detailing was not necessary so long as the "essence" was captured.

Eagar's engraving of *Halifax, N.S. from Fort Needham* 1837 follows Gilpin's compositional advice, and is based on the formula established by Claude Lorrain (1600-1682) (fig.2). Utilizing Claudian devices, seen in Eagar's *Italian Landscape* c. 1830, he gave his views of Halifax a European sensibility (fig.3).



fig.2 William H. EAGAR (1796-1839). *Halifax, N.S. from Fort Needham 1837*. Coloured engraving. Engraved in colour by J. Gellatly, Edinburgh, published by C.H. Belcher, Halifax 1837. Plate 3 of *Landscape Illustrations of Nova Scotia*. (Photo: Metropolitan Toronto Library Board.)

The regulations for tinting watercolour sketches were aligned to the colour found in works by Claude; these aimed to duplicate the "golden glow" of his seventeenth-century Italianate landscape. Eagar presumably instructed his students to follow Gilpin's guidelines, which left little margin for error. The first step was to sketch in the outline and shade with India ink, then add an overall wash of blue or orange. While the sky was still moist, the upper portion was treated with the other of these hues. If only a small area of sky was visible, it might be all blue or orange, although Gilpin preferred the latter. Boxed watercolours generally included a cake of blue, "neutral tint," to dust into the distance and over any water surface when the paper was dry. Finishing touches were spelled out explicitly:

Then introduce browns of various kinds, into the foreground; but slightly, and when all is dry, one can touch some of the brightest parts with dead green or a little gall-stone. Burnt Terra-de-Sienna mixed with a little gall-stone, makes a good foliage tint.²⁴

These same rules applied for the most part to landscapes in oil, with the result that scenery of any country appeared overshadowed by the same



fig.3 William H. EAGAR (1796-1839), *Italian Landscape* c. 1830. Oil.
Coll.: J.H.M. Eagar, Dartmouth, N.S. (Photo: the author.)

brown-toned, atmospheric haze. Two unfinished oil panels Eagar worked up from drawings for *Nova Scotia Scenery* document preparatory stages of underpainting along with vibrant skies, predominantly in blues, yellow and orange. The effect of loose brushwork and brilliant colour in "*Blomidan, Basin of Minas*" c. 1836 and *Cornwallis, Grand Pré and Basin of Minas. From the North Mountain* c. 1836 is especially appealing (figs.4,5). Eagar had begun applying a finer degree of finish to a foreground grouping, bottom right, in the latter panel. His use of drab earth pigments to refine details of leaves and branches predicts his final overpainting. It would be nearly monochromatic to conform with Gilpin-inspired Regency landscape standards.

Eagar could also alter Gilpin's rules to produce distinctly personal interpretations of his Nova Scotian environment. *View of Bedford Basin* 1839, records with increased fidelity the natural setting of the town, "founded upon a rock," with poor soil cover and meager vegetation²³ (fig.6). Less picturesque than *Fort Needham*, without the ominous, sublime quality of dense forest, *Bedford Basin* is composed of similar elements, with



fig. 4 William H. EAGAR (1796-1839). "Blomidon, Basin of Minas" c. 1836. Oil. Coll.: Public Archives of Nova Scotia. Published as lithograph in Eagar's series, *Landscape Illustrations of Nova Scotia*, 1837 (title later changed to *Nova Scotia Scenery*, 1840). (Photo: the author.)

alternate pathways for the eye to meander over the expansive Basin perimeters. Eagar's delicate, feather-stroked foliage identify a young maple on the left, and an elm to the right, but with its tree mass reduced this view is not so congested and is more panoramic. Miss Hoffman's *View of Bedford Basin*, executed under Eagar's guidance, was exhibited in 1838; she also reproduced a third Eagar drawing of the area, *Halifax from Reeve's Hill*.

The high percentage of scenic views by Eagar attest to his preference for landscape, but he seemingly did not impose his bias on his students. He encouraged Ellen Nutting to exercise her penchant for portraiture and figure drawing while attending classes, and hung her *Sketch (of) a Young Lady* in company with five paintings borrowed from the Nutting family for his display in 1832. Although she was familiar with Dutch landscape by Cuyp and others, Nutting was more attuned to the Northern interpretation of individuality; she preferred to study Ostade's *A Fish Woman* and Vanderworff's *Burgomaster's Wife*. In later years, while visiting friends and taking part in social gatherings, she sketched a number of prominent



fig.5 **William H. EAGAR (1796-1839).** *Cornwallis, Grand Pré and Basin of Minas. From the North Mountain* c. 1836. Oil. Coll.: Public Archives of Nova Scotia. Published as engraving in Eagar's series, *Landscape Illustrations of Nova Scotia*, 1837 (title later changed to *Nova Scotia Scenery*, 1840). (Photo: the author.)

Haligonians. Nutting was extremely fashion-conscious; she concentrated her attention on delineation of the face, in the tradition of miniature portraiture, but her preliminary costume description, seldom completed, anticipates the fashion-plate journals of the 1860's.

Eagar's pupils represented many of the town's fashionable families. A catalogue prepared by Eagar of the exhibition he organized in Halifax in 1838 contains the names of approximately fifteen "ladies who have been, or are at present, pupils" of the Academy. W.H. Jones (fl. 1829-1831), a former drawing master with rooms at Dalhousie College, Halifax, was reported teaching forty or more students in 1830; there is no reason to think Eagar would not have had as many, or more.²⁶

Two of the exhibitors were women: Mrs. T. (Thomas) Pyke and Mrs. (John William) Ritchie, wives of a city merchant and lawyer respectively; the remainder were young ladies who had completed their formal education.²⁷ The majority, wealthy, cultured and socially privileged, had been exposed to art works at home. Private Halifax collections contained a number of works



fig. 6 William H. EAGAR (1796-1839). *View of Bedford Basin* 1839. Lithograph. Coll.: Public Archives of Nova Scotia. Drawn on stone by William Eagar, lithographed by T. Moore, Boston, published by C.H. Belcher, Halifax, July 1839, Part I, *Nova Scotia Scenery*. (Photo: Metropolitan Toronto Library Board.)

by distinguished American and European artists.²⁸ At least eight pupils belonged to families who lent paintings attributed to such masters as Van Dyke, Sir Joshua Reynolds and Eustache Lesueur. Dr. Matthias Francis Hoffman, whose daughter took lessons from Eagar, contributed his own portrait painted by Lascellis H. Hoppner (1788-1875), former student and gold medalist at the London Royal Academy. Academy students inherited from their parents the prevalent nineteenth-century philosophy that the arts have a moral and civilizing influence on national character; academician Ellen Nutting's father, prothonotary James Walton Nutting, lectured on this topic at the Mechanic's Institute.²⁹ Eagar's pupils were also directed by the belief that art was one of those "elegant and mental acquisitions (along with music, dancing and speaking French), which adorn Society, make the domestic circle graceful and attractive, and ought ever to form a part of the character of a Lady."³⁰ These women applied to Mr. Eagar's school with the expectation of increasing their artistic appreciation and of refining drawing skills they had acquired at one of the local seminaries, or, in the case of the extremely affluent, at a finishing school abroad. Their object was to polish their proficiency, not to perfect it. Social pressure inhibited women from

considering art as a professional career; excellence in any one field of endeavour was discouraged. Mrs. Ellis, author of an influential child guidance manual, advised parents of young girls:

To be able to do a great many things tolerably well, is of infinitely more value to a woman, than to be able to excel in any one. By the former, she may render herself generally useful; by the latter, she may dazzle for an hour. By being apt, and tolerably well skilled in everything, she may fall into any situation in life with dignity and ease — by devoting her time to excellence in one, she may remain incapable of every other.³¹

The exceptions to this rule were women dependent on art for a living. Both Maria Morris and Mrs. (Jane) Carroll, who attended the Academy, belonged in this category, for they were themselves art teachers in Halifax establishments of a similar type.³² They managed private schools for daughters of the Halifax elite.

Maria Morris Miller (1810-1875) was Eagar's most successful pupil and Nova Scotia's foremost female artist in the nineteenth century.³³ Born in Guysborough County, Nova Scotia, she was descended from a distinguished provincial family. When her father, Guy Morris, died at an early age, his widow Sybella (Legett) Morris moved the family to Halifax, where she opened a ladies' seminary in 1831. Miss Morris had studied under W.H. Jones and Monsieur L'Estrange, drawing masters who had preceded Eagar in the community. Reference to a student work included in Jones' 1831 exhibition indicates she had developed an aptitude for landscape painting before attending Mr. Eagar's school. An encouraging Halifax critic reported her success with a difficult subject, *The Cascatelles of Tivoli* 1831; he felt it was admirably executed, writing that "the trees, sheet of water and ruins exhibit much neatness and command of pencil, with a very pleasing appropriate regard to delicate delineation."³⁴ L'Estrange, who claimed his "style of copying nature in her richest attire has been acknowledged by the best informed artists in Great Britain," taught her portraiture.³⁵ An exceptional degree of expertise is evident in her recently discovered portrait, *The Convalescent* c. 1845, thought to be her young red-haired daughter, Rosa. She later published three sets of botanical engravings, *Wild Flowers of Nova Scotia*, which were greatly admired for their scientific accuracy, technical competence and delicate beauty.³⁶ Joseph Howe wrote an editorial praising her work as a teacher and artist, calling public attention to the "taste and talent exhibited by another person — a female and a native." With remarks clearly pointed towards Halifax fashionables who cared more for

personal adornment than intellectual stimulation, Howe suggested others might well follow the example of the Governor's wife, Lady Campbell, in patronizing the Morris project.

It seems Eagar believed Mrs. Carroll's art to be of superior quality.³⁷ Two of her paintings were included in the catalogue with the selection of European masters Eagar borrowed for his display; the majority of other student entries are listed together on succeeding pages. Eagar assembled this exhibition "to revive a taste and encourage native talent."³⁸ Artists and amateurs alike were invited to submit samples of their work. As only two participating female artists were not enrolled at his Academy, one assumes that Eagar instructed the most talented Haligonians as well as the wealthiest. Two months before the exhibition opened, Eagar had begun classes for "Lads, Young Men, and others," but apparently these gentlemen were not prepared to display their attempts to public scrutiny.³⁹

The background of young ladies entering Mr. Eagar's school can be assessed by examining the educational system of the 1830's. The School Act, passed in 1811, had begun the move towards public education in Nova Scotia, but, in general, upper-class parents still sent their children to private institutions. There were separate schools for girls and boys but the latter had more choice of curricula. Joseph Howe campaigned vociferously against the widely-held opinion that classical studies were a waste of time and money for women; in the 1830's, however, female education invariably included subjects considered to be suitable preparation for a domestic career as a "valuable mother and useful wife."⁴⁰ A number of schools offered courses for wealthy daughters in Halifax whose parents were assured of scrupulous attention to the minds and manners of their offspring. The "Drawing and Day School" managed by the Misses Morris next door to the Eagers was one of the city's best and most progressive. Mrs. Sybella Morris, assisted by her daughter, offered a full program for girls from the age of four to "completion of an English education."⁴¹ These women stressed the importance of early guidance to gain proficient pronunciation, and promised "to draw their minds to reflect upon their lessons as a pastime." Emphasis was placed on the Four Grand Pillars (English grammar, writing, arithmetic and geography), "on which only an enduring superstructure can be raised." The "modest" fee, twenty-five pounds for girls under ten, thirty-five pounds for those above that age, also included instruction in history, the use of globes, elements of astronomy, French, and plain and ornamental needlework. Drawing and music were taught for an additional fee; these classes were held in the afternoon so that outside students attending other schools, which did

not provide these types of instruction, might also attend. Maria Morris devoted her time exclusively to art and was prepared to teach “figures in water colour; landscape in pencil, chalk or water colour; flowers, fruits, birds and shells on velvet, satin or paper.” She offered private and class instruction three days weekly from ten until three o’clock. Exposure to these “genteel arts” was intended to help occupy leisure time as a wife and mother, produce decorative household articles, and prepare designs for embroidery and needlework. Young ladies who excelled in this training and wished for further instruction applied to Mr. Eagar’s Academy.

Within a short time Eagar had established his reputation as a teacher and his position as one of the foremost landscape artists in Halifax. A lengthy account of the artist and his work in the *Telegraph* was reprinted by Howe’s *Novascotian*, the last of a three-part series on local artists.⁴² Maria Morris and William Valentine joined Eagar as the leading art specialists in the community. Although his Academy had a promising start, evidently it did not produce sufficient income for a family of eleven. In all likelihood he was beginning to suffer from initial symptoms signalling the onset of tubercular consumption.

Perhaps following the advice of friends (Valentine?) Eagar expanded his Academy classes to include “young men and others who might obtain facilities not now possessed.”⁴³ The only school in town at that time where boys could learn basic drawing was operated by John S. Thompson.⁴⁴ Youths interested in a military career applied elsewhere in the province, to the Annapolis Academy or the school at Mabou, where courses included “Military and Landscape Drawing, Use of the Camera Obscura, and Instructions in Fortifications.”⁴⁵ To satisfy the Halifax demand, which was more than Thompson’s school could meet, Eagar offered two hours of elementary drawing and colouring on specified days; in the evening, equal time was allotted to “Rudiments of Perspective, Mechanical and Architectural Drawing.” For some reason, however, he was reluctant to commence this venture. His notice reveals none of his usual professional self-esteem. Expressing skepticism, he agreed to adopt the system for a trial period only. With his other Academy classes continuing as usual, a large portion of Eagar’s day was devoted to teaching. He may have resented this increased responsibility because it would limit other activities, or did he dislike the idea of taking students with no previous art training? Being a drawing master to upper-class women, which was considered a professional undertaking, was socially acceptable in nineteenth-century Halifax; instructing novices in need of drawing skills to earn a living relegated one to

dealing “in trade.” With a sigh of resignation, Eagar defended his decision to proceed:

Anxious to employ his time to the best advantage for the community in which he resides, he proposes to adopt the suggestion and give the system a trial.

Nova Scotia Scenery, Eagar’s publication of engraved watercolours, was a logical step for a talented landscape artist with a stockpile of local views, useful as teaching examples but producing little income. Haligonians, conservative by nature, were not inclined to pay for Nova Scotian scenes they might readily view for themselves, especially once they had learned how to view the scenery through Eagar’s eyes. Eagar publicized a prospectus during spring, 1836, announcing his intention to make available “views of all the most important parts of the Province.”⁴⁶ When the first three scenes met with favourable reception, he announced a second volume featuring landscapes of New Brunswick.⁴⁷ His publishing venture frequently interfered with his teaching duties. During the autumn of 1839 he was travelling in New Brunswick (making sketches?), when he was “exposed to wet.”⁴⁸ This accident resulted in pneumonia. Eagar’s death in November 1839 terminated a promising career and closed the doors of a respected Halifax cultural institution.⁴⁹

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Notes

¹ For biographical information see Alexandra E. CARTER, *William H. Eagar: Sensibilities of no common order*, (M.F.A. thesis, Montréal: Concordia University, 1979); Harry PIERS, “Artists in Nova Scotia,” *Collections*, vol. 18, (Halifax: Nova Scotia Historical Society, 1914), pp. 141-145; *Newfoundland Mercantile Journal* 1818-1819; *Newfoundland Ledger and General Advertiser* 1818-1834; *Novascotian* 1834-1840.

² “Profile Miniature Likenesses Neatly Painted,” *Newfoundland Ledger and General Advertiser*, 6 Oct. 1829.

³ “For a Few Weeks Only,” *Newfoundland Ledger and General Advertiser*, 11 Dec. 1829.

⁴ “Portrait Painting,” *Newfoundland Ledger and General Advertiser*, 18 May 1830.

⁵ “Mr. Eagar has taken School Room,” *Newfoundland Ledger and General Advertiser*, 3 Jan. 1832.

⁶ “Portrait Painting ...,” *Newfoundland Ledger and General Advertiser*, 29 June 1832.

⁷ “For a Few Weeks Only,” *Newfoundland Ledger and General Advertiser*, 14 Jan.-25 Mar. 1834.

⁸ “Landscape and Portrait Painting in Oil and Water Colours,” *Novascotian*, 3 Sept. 1834.

⁹ “Removal, Board-Lodging Establishment,” *Novascotian*, 8 Jan. 1834.

¹⁰ The depressed economic conditions in Halifax in the mid-1830’s are summarized from reports in the *Novascotian*.

¹¹ “Seminary,” *Novascotian*, 4 Feb. 1836.

¹² Eagar is said to have given up portraiture in deference to Valentine’s superior ability in this branch of art. This fact may have proven true when both men were practising in Halifax, but it had not been an outcome of their first meeting in St. John’s five years earlier. After Eagar relinquished his idea of landscape lessons and returned to portraiture, his prices for portraits in Newfoundland exceeded those charged by Valentine in Halifax in 1837 for portraits of an identical size. See Harry PIERS, “Artists in Nova Scotia,” *Collections*, vol. 18 (Halifax: Nova Scotia Historical Society, 1914), p. 141; “Portrait Painting” (Eagar’s advertisement), *Newfoundland Ledger and General Advertiser*, 29 June 1832; “Portrait Painting” (Valentine’s advertisement), *Novascotian*, 23 Mar. 1837.

- ¹³ "Landscape and Portrait Painting in Oil and Water Colours," *Novascotian*, 4 Sept. 1934.
- ¹⁴ (William EAGAR), *Catalogue of Mr. Eagar's Exhibition of Paintings* (Halifax: J. Cunnabell, 1838). Copy material available in Halifax is found in advertisements in the *Novascotian*, 15 June 1836, 9 Feb. 1837, 27 Nov. 1838.
- ¹⁵ Carl Paul BARBIER, *William Gilpin: His Drawings, Teaching, and Theory of the Picturesque* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), intro., p. iii.
- ¹⁶ Samuel REDGRAVE, *Dictionary of Artists of the English School* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1874). Crisall: p. 103; DeWint: p. 103; Hunt: p. 221; Prout: p. 326; Robson: p. 346; Stanfield: pp. 389-390.
- ¹⁷ (William EAGAR), *Catalogue of Mr. Eagar's Exhibition of Paintings* (Halifax: J. Cunnabell, 1838), [p. 6]. Stanfield enjoyed wide popularity in the nineteenth century. Sir George Back, Arctic explorer, and Cornelius Krieghoff refer to Stanfield in unpublished correspondence. Reference supplied by Dr. J. Russell Harper.
- ¹⁸ Mr. and Mrs. Berkeley, drawing masters, stopped briefly in Saint John, N.B., in 1831, offering to teach any person, "even children of ordinary talents," to draw correctly from nature in six lessons. At an earlier date, Dr. Hunt had wrapped up his lecture series in the same town with a proposal to teach a new, familiar and comprehensive "Theory of Perspective" in one lesson. See respective advertisements, *Courier* (St. John, N.B.), 3 Sept. 1831; 31 Oct. 1829.
- ¹⁹ See note 14.
- ²⁰ David COX, *A Treatise on Landscape Painting in Water Colours* (London: The Studio, 1813, reprint ed., 1922), p. 14.
- ²¹ C.H. Belcher's advertisement, *Novascotian*, 25 Dec. 1833.
- ²² William GILPIN, quoted in Christopher HUSSEY, *The Picturesque: Studies in a Point of View* (London: Frank Cass & Co., 1967), p. 115.
- ²³ William GILPIN, *The Author's Account of the Principles on which the drawings are executed; now brought to sale, for the Endowment of a Parish-School at Boldre, Near Lymington* (London: T. Cadell, Jun. & W. Davies, 1802), p. 4. As natural scenery was less than perfect, it should be treated in the same way.
- ²⁴ William GILPIN, *Ibid.*, p. 34.
- ²⁵ Heritage Trust of Nova Scotia, *Founded Upon a Rock* (Heritage Trust, Halifax, N.S., 1967).
- ²⁶ Mr. Jones organized the first two Halifax exhibitions, 1830-1831, at Dalhousie College. See "Exhibition of Pictures," *Novascotian*, 11 Feb., 7 Apr., 14 May 1830; *Halifax Monthly* 2 (June 1831): 30.
- ²⁷ St. Paul's Church Records: 1832, daughter born to Thomas and Francis Pyke, merchant; 19 Apr. 1839, daughter born to John William and Amelia Rebecca Ritchie, barrister.
- ²⁸ These works had been captured in transit during the 1812 War and auctioned in Halifax. Jones borrowed a number for his exhibitions. See Harry PIERS, "Artists in Nova Scotia," *Collections* (Halifax: Nova Scotia Historical Society, 1914), p. 157.
- ²⁹ "Mechanic's [sic] Institute," *Novascotian*, 30 Mar. 1836; J.W. Nutting agrees to speak on "The Influence of Literature, and the Fine Arts, on National Character."
- ³⁰ Advertisement for Miss Whitwell's Seminary, *Novascotian*, 2 July 1835.
- ³¹ Mrs. ELLIS, *The Family Monitor and Domestic Guide*, quoted by Linda NOCHLIN, "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" *Art News* 69 (1970-71): 36.
- ³² The Morris school is discussed below. The "English and French Boarding and Day School" directed by Mrs. Carroll was at her residence on Hollis Street. See advertisement, *Novascotian*, 2 Oct. 1833.
- ³³ Mary SPARLING believes botanical painter Maria Morris Miller is not the same person as Mary Morris, who exhibited in Halifax, 1838. *Great Expectations: The European Vision in Nova Scotia 1749-1848*, ex. cat. (Halifax, N.S.: Mount Saint Vincent Art Gallery, 1980), p. 67, fn. 17.
- ³⁴ "Exhibition of Pictures," *Halifax Monthly* 2 (June 1831): 30.
- ³⁵ Harry PIERS, "Artists in Nova Scotia," *Collections* (Halifax: Nova Scotia Historical Society, 1914), p. 124.
- ³⁶ Belcher's received Parts 1 and 2 of the first series, November 1840. Each unit comprised three hand-coloured, lithographed plates, costing five shillings. See Belcher advertisement, *Novascotian*, 19 Nov. 1840. The second edition was issued in 1853; the third, incomplete, in 1867. See PIERS, *op. cit.* A three-volume set of original drawings, never published, in mint condition, is now in the collection, N.S.M.
- ³⁷ Mrs. Carroll continued expanding her artistic knowledge and opened one of the earliest photography studios in Halifax, at the corner of Prince and Barrington Streets. See Jim BURANT, "Pre-Confederation Photography in Halifax, N.S.," *Journal of Canadian Art History* 4, 1 (1977), pp. 31-32.
- ³⁸ "Exhibition of Paintings," *Novascotian*, 21 Dec. 1837.
- ³⁹ "Drawing Academy," *Times* (Halifax), 9 Jan. 1838.
- ⁴⁰ (Joseph Howe), "Female Education," *Novascotian*, 17 Sept. 1835.
- ⁴¹ Morris advertisements, *Novascotian*, 21 May 1834; 4 Feb., 30 Jul., 13, Aug. 1836; 7 Feb. 1839.
- ⁴² "The Fine Arts," *Novascotian*, (Morris) 14 Aug., (Eagar) 28 Sept. 1836; "Mr. Valentine, and Portrait Painting," 31 Aug. 1836.
- ⁴³ "Drawing Academy," *Times* (Halifax), 9 Jan. 1838.
- ⁴⁴ "John S. Thompson, Day School," *Novascotian*, 29 Oct. 1835.
- ⁴⁵ Advertisements for "Annapolis Academy," and "Mabou and Hillsborough Common and Grammar School," *Novascotian*, 6 Apr. 1836.

⁴⁶ "Prospectus," *Novascotian*, 12 May 1836.

⁴⁷ "Mr. Eagar ...," *Courier*, 9 Dec. 1837.

⁴⁸ He allegedly fell through the ice, but the Saint John River remained ice-free until after December 1839. See J. Russell HARPER, *Painting in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1966), p. 108; "The Weather Continues ... the Character of the Fall Months," *Novascotian*, 25 Dec. 1839 (reprint from) *Gleaner* (Miramichi, N.B.).

⁴⁹ Obituary: *Colonial Pearl* (Halifax), 29 Nov.; *Times* (Halifax) 26 Nov.; *Royal Gazette* (Halifax) 27 Nov. 1839.

RÉSUMÉ

William H. Eagar:

professeur de dessin, rue Argyle, Halifax.

William H. Eagar (1796-1839) a exercé ses activités de professeur et d'artiste dans les deux villes portuaires de St-John's, Terre-Neuve et Halifax, Nouvelle-Écosse au cours des années 1830. Né en Irlande, Eagar a émigré à Terre-Neuve alors qu'il était encore un tout jeune homme, probablement pour travailler comme agent des pêches et non comme artiste. Il épousa en 1819, Maria Saunders, fille d'une famille respectable de l'île et dix ans plus tard il possédait une propriété importante dans les environs de St-John's.

Eagar ouvrit un studio au Old London Theatre de St-John's en 1829, offrant ses talents comme silhouettiste et paysagiste. Sir Thomas Cochrane, gouverneur de Terre-Neuve, commanda à Eagar, en 1831, une vue panoramique de St-John's depuis Signal Hill. Eagar se rendit à Londres où la vue fut gravée. Stimulé par les oeuvres de aquarellistes anglais, il se proposa de n'enseigner que l'art du paysage à son retour à St-John's; devant l'échec de cette expérience, il s'occupa de nouveau à faire des portraits.

À Halifax, en 1834, Eagar installa une Académie de dessins sur la rue Barrington afin d'initier les filles et les femmes venant des bonnes familles à ce fini de culture nécessaire à toute éducation digne de ce nom. Dans l'annonce qu'il fit paraître il signala qu'il pouvait enseigner les méthodes actuelles de pratiquer l'aquarelle comme le faisaient Prout, Stanfield, Robson, DeWint, Hunt, Cristal et plusieurs autres aquarellistes anglais de renommée. Son enseignement consistait d'une part à faire copier par les étudiants des vues, déjà gravées par d'autres artistes, ou ses propres oeuvres, il les initia également à interpréter le paysage selon la manière "picturesque", en vogue alors dans l'école anglaise.

Apprécié par ses contemporains, Eagar fut également très impliqué dans la communauté. Sa carrière de professeur prit fin prématurément alors qu'il n'avait que 43 ans.

Alexandra E. Carter