

LIFELONG ADVENTURER

John Hammond repelled Fenians, panned for gold before he became a teacher at Mount Allison

In a newspaper interview during the early part of the 20th century, John Hammond, director of the Mount Allison art department, recounted his recent trip to the Rockies.

«My trip this year was of more than usual interest from the fact that the country explored was entirely off the beaten track, part only being opened up to the most adventurous tourists and mountain climbers...situated at the foot of Mount Stephen, around which clusters marvellous scenery.

«After exploring the mountains in the immediate vicinity of the lake, we started to cross the Great Divide into the Yoho Valley, so famous for its newly found scenery. »

The vivid scenes he recounted were part of the colourful life the painter lived.

Born in Montreal, in 1843, he began working in a marble mill at the age of nine, and by 11 he had decided he wanted to be an artist. A short biography of the artist written during an exhibition of his works at Ogilvy's in Montreal in 1929, notes he was already adventuresome and wished to travel.

At the age of 23, he signed up to repel Fenians. The fear of the Fenians subsided and Hammond and his brother Henry sailed to London. The pair remained there for a few weeks before departing again, spending four months at sea before reaching New Zealand where a gold rush was underway.

Arriving in Christchurch, the pair walked 195 kilometres overland to the Gold Coast where they spent almost three years panning for gold.

Returning to Canada in 1870, John Hammond was working as a painter in Montreal when the opportunity to be part of Canadian history came along.

«In the spring of 1870 I was painting for Wm. Nortman photographer (in Montreal) when application was made to my employer by the Canadian government for a painter and a photographer, to join Mr. Selwyn, head of the Geological Survey of Canada and his associate Mr. Richardson.

«I volunteered for the service and the four of us left Montreal for San Francisco via the Central+Union Pacific U.S.A. at the time the only Transcontinental R.R. line in North America. From there we travelled north by stage-coach to Tacoma, and thence took ship to Victoria. From Victoria we sailed up the Fraser to Yale

and then took stage coach to Kamloops, then a Hudson's Bay trading post, where the expedition was formed. »

The expedition set off into the wilderness in June looking for the right spot to extend the Canadian Pacific Railway, Hammond's group was the only one of three expeditions to reach its target, the Yellowhead Pass, and emerged six months later, «half-frozen, half-starving, half-naked, with bleeding feet wrapped in gunny sacks.»

Hammond returned to Montreal, in the winter of 1871, working as a portrait painter, travelling throughout eastern Canada and the United States for nearly a decade before arriving in Saint John.

He is listed as a painter in the Saint John directory from 1880 to 1882, and to 1884.

In 1885, he went off to Europe. While in France, he exhibited two paintings at the Paris Salon Exhibition, garnering honours, and then at the Royal Academy Exhibition. The pictures would go on to be exhibited at St. George's Hall and at Nottingham Castle.

While in Holland, he painted with Whistler.

Hammond described Whistler as «An egotist and a genius. A skilful brush and a sharps tongue...His etchings are the equal of Rembrandt's. An amazingly clever painter, writer, lecturer, and wit. »

Hammond earned honours again in 1887 while exhibiting at the National Gallery in New York.

He returned to Saint John the next year.

Having befriended Sir William Van Horne, who would become his most important patron, Hammond found himself in British Columbia again in 1891.

Van Horne, who was president of the Canadian Pacific Railway in the late /880s, commissioned Hammond to paint the scenery of the Rockies, and record the railway's impact in the West.

«In 1891 I was on my way to the Canadian Rockies to paint them for the C.P.R. and approaching their foothills, when looking upon them, they appeared to be moving. I spoke to one near me wondering if I was being deceived. He said «No you are not deceived, you are looking upon thousands of Antelopes who are frightened by our trains. »

Hammond became director of the Owens Art Institution, in Saint John, in 1892, at the age of 49. The next year, he assumed teaching duties at Mount Allison, in Sackville, when the school bought the institution.

Throughout these years, he travelled in Europe, North America, China and Japan. He also found himself in Canton in 1900 during the Boxer rebellion where he said he escaped from a mob.

He became director of the School of Art at Mount Allison in 1907, holding the post until his retirement in 1919. He died in Sackville in 1939.

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