

PERFORMING CANADIAN IDENTITY: CHILDREN IN ICE SPORTS

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The focus of this exhibition is the representation of children in winter sports because they are the future of the sport, and of the nation. Pictures have been selected to examine the social and cultural aspects of spectatorship, and to explore how Canadian identity is being performed in these images, while also celebrating children's spontaneity and carefree fun. Sports like skating and hockey involve the need for "showing off," as can be seen in a number of the images included in this exhibition. The images address the issue of identity by combining the notions of "showing off" as an aspect of performance and for enjoyment, and "showing off" addressing the role of spectatorship in such sports. Even though there is a difference between winter activities and organized sport, for the purpose of this exhibition all such activities are generally discussed as sport and their role in the forming of identity.

The national representation of both sport and childhood is often focused on children skating, and playing hockey, on a river or a pond.¹ Sport spaces, such as skating rinks, are also the sites for the production and maintenance of Canadian social relations.² In recent years, the participation of children in sports is declining, which is something to think about in terms of the health and welfare of our nation.



Skating Carnival. Ca. 1881-1882

Arthur Elliot (Canadian, active May 1881-June 1882)

Watercolour and gouache over pencil on wove paper, 33.6 x 20.6 cm

Library and Archives Canada, Acc. No. R9266-220 Peter Winkworth Collection of
Canadiana

http://collectionsCanada.gc.ca/pam_archives/index.php?fuseaction=genitem.displayItem&lang=eng&rec_nbr=3017363.

This watercolour depicts an indoor skating rink with a large vault and ribbed ceiling, flags hanging from its rafters. It most likely represents the Victoria Skating Rink in Montreal completed in 1862, which was the first indoor rink named “Victoria Skating Rink” in Canada. A themed carnival is taking place in the indoor rink, and the skating area is crowded with children who are dressed in various costumes. In the 19th century, costumed skating carnivals and balls were very popular social activities. Their popularity is expressed for example in a periodical from 1864: “I am dazzled and blinded by a blaze of radiance. Gas sparkles in a thousand burners; flashes against burnished reflectors, which glitter like pure silver; lies full upon draperies in blue, scarlet and white lines; and loses itself in the intricacy of evergreen wreaths, garlands, and festoons.”³ There is a large number of spectators watching the scene, and several children are seen performing tricks on the ice as if to impress and “show off.” Some of the children are also portrayed as if they are looking at the viewer, making the viewer an active spectator.



Harriot Georgina, Countess of Dufferin, with members of her family, photographed in a winter studio setting with a toboggan, a sleigh, and snowshoes. 1873 (Ottawa, ON)

William James Topley (Canadian, 1845-1930)

Photograph, 16.5 x 10.8 cm, on support 17.6 x 10.9 cm

Library and Archives Canada/PA-186002

<http://collectionsCanada.gc.ca/pam_archives/index.php?fuseaction=genitem.displayItem&lang=eng&rec_nbr=3194719>.

Countess Harriot Georgina (1843-1936) is portrayed here with her children and with winter-themed props, and despite the fact that the scene is staged; it invokes the spirit of the Canadian winter and the fun that it brings. In this photograph Lady Dufferin with her children, simulating a tobogganing scene, sets an example as the wife of the Governor General. The photograph conveys the message to Canadian mothers that they can go outside when it is cold, and that they should go tobogganing and skating, and should participate in other winter events with their children.⁴ In this image the photographer is articulating the importance of winter sports for the health and welfare of the Canadian family.



Untitled: Winter activities in a Canadian town: sleighing, skating, and making a snowman. Ca. 1850-1860

Unknown artist, active ca. 1850-1860

Print: Hand-coloured lithograph on wove paper, unknown size

Library and Archives Canada, Acc. No. R9266-1428 Peter Winkworth Collection of Canadiana

http://collectionscanada.gc.ca/pam_archives/index.php?fuseaction=genitem.displayItem&lang=eng&rec_nbr=3028535.

The activities in this watercolour sketch express the idea of Canadian-ness through the sense of play and representation of various winter sports. The individual faces are not important because they are not portraits of individual people; rather the activities being performed serve as a portrait of Canadian identity. It is interesting to note, for example, that the snowman has the most distinctive features. The image invokes a feeling of belonging through the portrayal of children participating in activities such as building a snowman. However, the figures that are involved in the activities are all boys; there is one girl that is being pulled on a sleigh. This is perhaps because it was thought as more appropriate for girls to be a part of more passive leisure activities. The river is a central focus of the image, as a source of sport as well as transportation. In the nineteenth century, winter provided a freedom of mobility because people could get to a lot of places faster with a sleigh and a strong horse.⁵



Boy skating down an ice-covered log dump with a hockey stick on Sloe Lake. March 1943

Ronny Jaques (1910-2008), Photograph: Negative Film B/W - cellulose nitrate, unknown size

Library and Archives Canada

http://collectionscanada.gc.ca/pam_archives/index.php?fuseaction=genitem.displayItem&lang=eng&rec_nbr=3197694.

Ronny Jaques (1910-2008) was a popular photographer who covered fashion, travel, performing arts and lifestyle scenes for American magazines, in particular *Harper's Bazaar* and *Town & Country*.⁶ In this photograph, the boy skating down the ice-covered log dump is enjoying “showing off,” perhaps in front his friends.



Three children skating. Ca. 1882

Arthur Elliot (Canadian, active May 1881-June 1882)

Watercolour, pen and black ink on wove paper, laid down, 11.3 x 11.2 cm

Library and Archives Canada, Acc. No. R9266-2766V Peter Winkworth Collection of Canadiana

http://collectionscanada.gc.ca/pam_archives/index.php?fuseaction=genitem.displayItem&lang=eng&rec_nbr=2894537.

This watercolour drawing is of three young girls skating and holding hands. The girls, dressed very nicely, are meant to be looked at. They are showing off their skating skills as well as their status through their fine clothing. Their faces are not individualized; there is more focus on the texture of the coats, hats, and the ice. The coats they are wearing with the fur lining were very fashionable at the end of the nineteenth century.⁷ The girl on the right is wearing a French Canadian tuque, which is significant because it makes the notion of Canadian identity being performed even more pronounced. At the end of the nineteenth century, skating was considered particularly suited for young girls: “Skating is for a girl excellent exercise... Skating improves the figure... It is a most becoming exercise for her, and is much in every way to be commended.”⁸ Arthur Elliott, an English artist who sketched between 1881 and 1882 dozens of lively scenes while visting Montreal , was especially interested in winter views of the city. Several were reproduced in the Montreal-based magazine, the *Canadian Illustrated News*.⁹



YOUNG CANADA 1885 (Quebec QC)

Henri Julien (1852-1908)

Print, 59 x 42 cm

Library and Archives Canada, Acc. No. 1980-80-13V:b

<http://collectionsCanada.gc.ca/pam_archives/index.php?fuseaction=genitem.displayItem&lang=eng&rec_nbr=2837653>.

Henri Julien (14 May 1852–17 September 1908) was a French Canadian artist and cartoonist noted for his work for the *Canadian Illustrated News*. This image shows multiple scenes of children engaged in winter activities such as tobogganing, snow-shoeing, and children dressed in striped coats holding shovels and sleigh cords. The centre image is a girl wearing a bonnet. This scene is part of a Supplement to the Montreal Daily Star - Carnival Number, which is a large sheet folded twice.



Future hockey stars are instructed in proper method of body checking in Arnprior, Ont., January 1956. 1956

Gar Lunney (Canadian)

Photograph, unknown size

Library and Archives Canada / PA-111481

http://collectionsCanada.gc.ca/pam_archives/index.php?fuseaction=genitem.displayItem&lang=eng&rec_nbr=3386204.

In this photograph by Gar Lunney, young boys are being instructed in the “proper method of body checking.” While the image creates an illusion of action, there is nothing instantaneous about the scene. The boys and the coach are clearly staged, pretending to be learning. Hockey is truly “Canada’s game”: in spite of having roots in a wide variety of similar sports, the game of hockey as we know it today was developed in Canada. Hockey is so popular that a number of Canadian cities claim to have started it. It continues to be important in Arnprior to this day with their team Ottawa Valley Titans, and with hockey tournaments being held at the city’s Civic Centre.¹⁰ This image affirms the importance of hockey in identifying with being Canadian—nationally and locally.



American Sporting scene - Trout Fishing Boys choosing sides for hockey on Sarnia Bay, [Ont.]. 29 December 1908

John Boyd

Photograph, unknown size

Library and Archives Canada/ PA-060732

<http://collectionscanada.gc.ca/pam_archives/index.php?fuseaction=genitem.displayItem&lang=eng&rec_nbr=3194090>.

Hockey has been “Canada’s game” for decades, and it has created a sense of belonging and national pride for young and older boys alike. In this photograph we see a group of boys eager to play a game of hockey. John Boyd (1865-1941) was an amateur photographer and railway employee in Toronto and Sarnia during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, specializing in nature photography, as well as in photographs of Toronto buildings and street scenes.



First Arctic Winter Games. Figure Skating. March 1970 (Yellowknife, N.W.T.)

D. Paterson (Canadian)

Photograph, unknown size

Library and Archives Canada/ e007914214

http://collectionsCanada.gc.ca/pam_archives/index.php?fuseaction=genitem.displayItem&lang=eng&rec_nbr=3712775.

In this photograph, girls of various ages are standing in a conversational group. The scene displays the awkwardness of adolescence in the girls' poses and facial expressions. It is interesting to examine the notion of performance in this picture. These girls, participants in the First Arctic Winter Games, have to put on a performance and thus should be used to being watched, but in this backstage picture there is a sense of discomfort. They appear to be ignoring the photographer which adds to the strangeness of the situation.



*A boy is delighted to open his parcel and to find a pair of skates. January 1957
(Quebec, QC)*

Chris Lund (1923-1983)

Photograph, unknown size

Library and Archives Canada/PA-111396

http://collectionscanada.gc.ca/pam_archives/index.php?fuseaction=genitem.displayItem&lang=eng&rec_nbr=3385375.

This image is a good example of how important skating is in the forming of a Canadian youth's sense of belonging. This boy is very excited to receive skates because they allow him to play with other children. Socializing in this way at one time was extremely important to Canadian children. Sport touches many aspects of Canadians' lives—their health and well-being, their social networks, their sense of social connectedness. In recent years, however, boys' participation in sports has declined from 66% in 1992 to 56% in 2005.¹¹

NOTES

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- ¹Noel Dyck and Eduardo P. Archetti, *Sport, dance, and embodied identities* (Oxford: Berg, 2003) 55.
- ²John Bale and Patricia Anne Vertinsky, *Sites of Sport: Space, Place, Experience* (New York: Routledge, 2004) 58.
- ³Samuel Lucas, "A Skating Rink in Canada," *Once a Week* 10:245 (5 Mar. 1864): 296.
- ⁴Joan M. Swartz, "Notman's Canada," in the online exhibition *Snow and ice: the Canadian winter*, McCord Museum (2004) 16 Dec. 2011 <<http://www.mccord-museum.qc.ca/en/keys/virtualexhibits/notmanstudio/exploration/video/hi/clip12.html>>.
- ⁵Dennis Reid, "Notman's Canada," in the online exhibition *Snow and ice: the Canadian winter*, McCord Museum (2004) 16 Dec. 2011 <<http://www.mccord-museum.qc.ca/en/keys/virtualexhibits/notmanstudio/exploration/video/hi/clip12.html>>.
- ⁶Pamela Fiori, *Stolen Moments: The Photographs of Ronny Jaques* (New York: Glitterati, 2008) <<http://stolenmomentsbook.com/ronny-jaques.html>>.
- ⁷Jacqueline Beaudoin Ross, "Winter Clothing in Quebec in the 19th Century," *McCord Museum Collection*, 16 Dec. 2011 <http://www.mccord-museum.qc.ca/scripts/explore.php?Lang=1&tablename=theme&tableid=11&elementid=86_true&contentlong>.
- ⁸Pye Henry Chavasse, *Advice to a mother on the management of her children and on the treatment of some of their more pressing illnesses and accidents*, Toronto: Willing & Williamson, 1880: 273.
- ⁹"Biographies: Arthur Elliott," In *Canada – A Collector's Passion*. Library and Archives Canada, 16 Dec. 2011 <http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/webarchives/20060119112128/http://www.lac-bac.gc.ca/art/050602/0506020707_e.html>.
- ¹⁰Bob Ferguson, "MINOR HOCKEY: Arnprior to host peewee championship," *The Ottawa Citizen* (22 Feb. 1995): B7, 18 Dec 2011 <<http://0-search.proquest.com/mercury.concordia.ca/canadiannewsmajor/docview/239922110/133B9D56E524D430DA2/1?accountid=10246>>.
- ¹¹Warren Clark, "Canadian Social Trends: Kids' Sports," *Statistics Canada*, 17 Dec. 2011 <<http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/11-008-x/2008001/article/10573-eng.htm>>.

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