

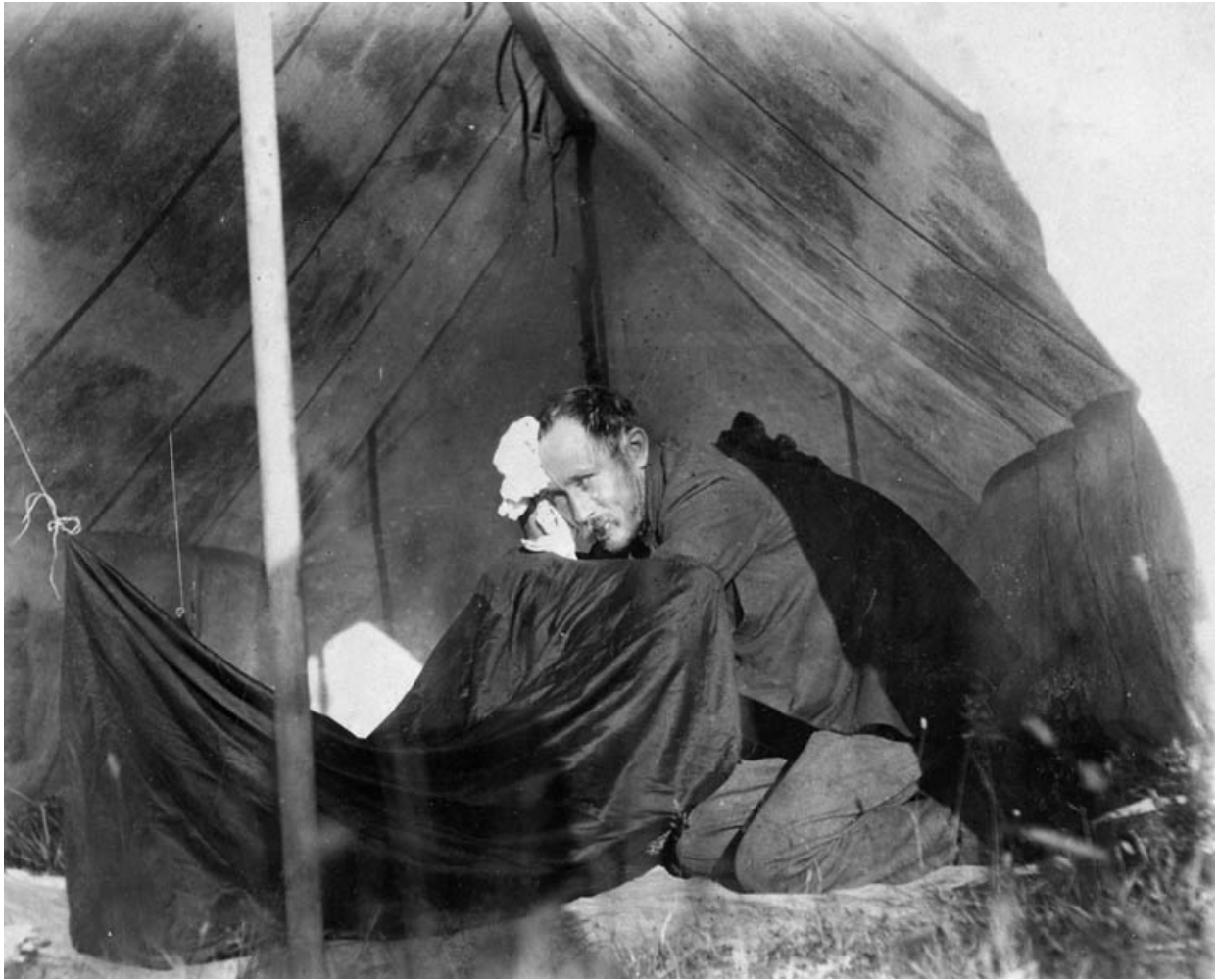
# WATCHING THE WATCHMEN: PORTRAITS OF PHOTOGRAPHERS AT WORK

Michel Hardy-Vallée

Being portrayed by the camera can often feel like an act of predation. Who doesn't hide their face in passing before a group of tourists? Who isn't annoyed by the zoom of a relative shoved in one's face with an insistent request to smile? It is no accident that many photographers are notoriously camera shy, and that they are seldom the subject of their own art.<sup>1</sup>

Despite their retributory aspect, portraits of photographers are more than an amusing game of *l'arroseur arrosé*, especially when the artists are pictured with their tools. Unlike formal portraits of photographers, all the images selected here show someone manipulating a camera or engaged in work preparatory to making an exposure.<sup>2</sup> By showing the seams in the fabric of photography, this selection of images from Library and Archives Canada attempts to question our habitual understanding of photography as a transparent medium, through which we see a subject directly, without the distortions of one's interpretation or subjectivity.

Often relegated to the marginal pages of publications and exhibits, portraits of photographers engaged in the act of taking pictures are in fact rich with indications of craft, practical considerations, but also kinship, intimacy, and interrogations on the medium. Portraits of processes more than they are portraits of individuals, these images function as a distinct, albeit sometimes accidental genre of portraiture—one that emerged from an informal practice of mutual representation between fellow image-makers.



The Camp Photographer (Dr. W.H. Ellis) after changing plates, 1897

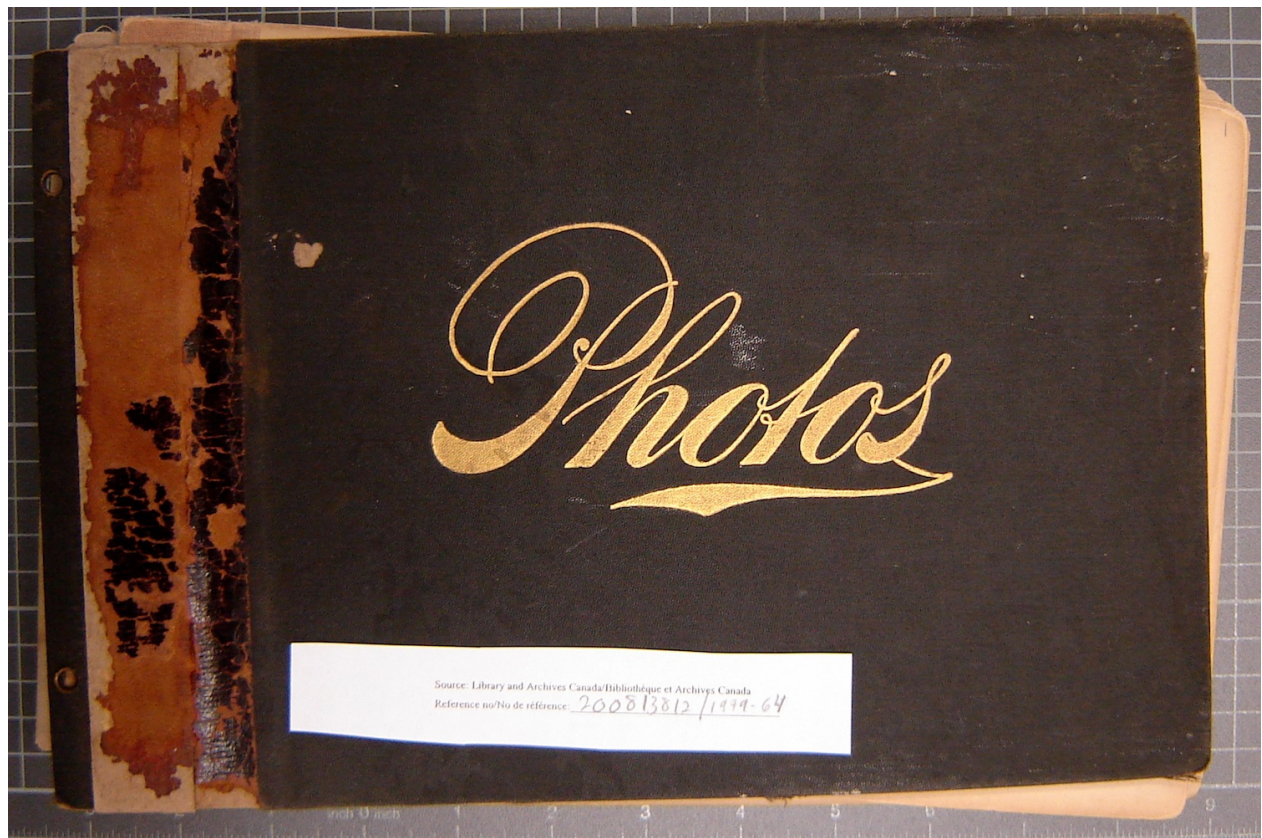
Photographer unknown

Albumen print from album, 99 x 118 mm

Library and Archives Canada / MIKAN 3191924

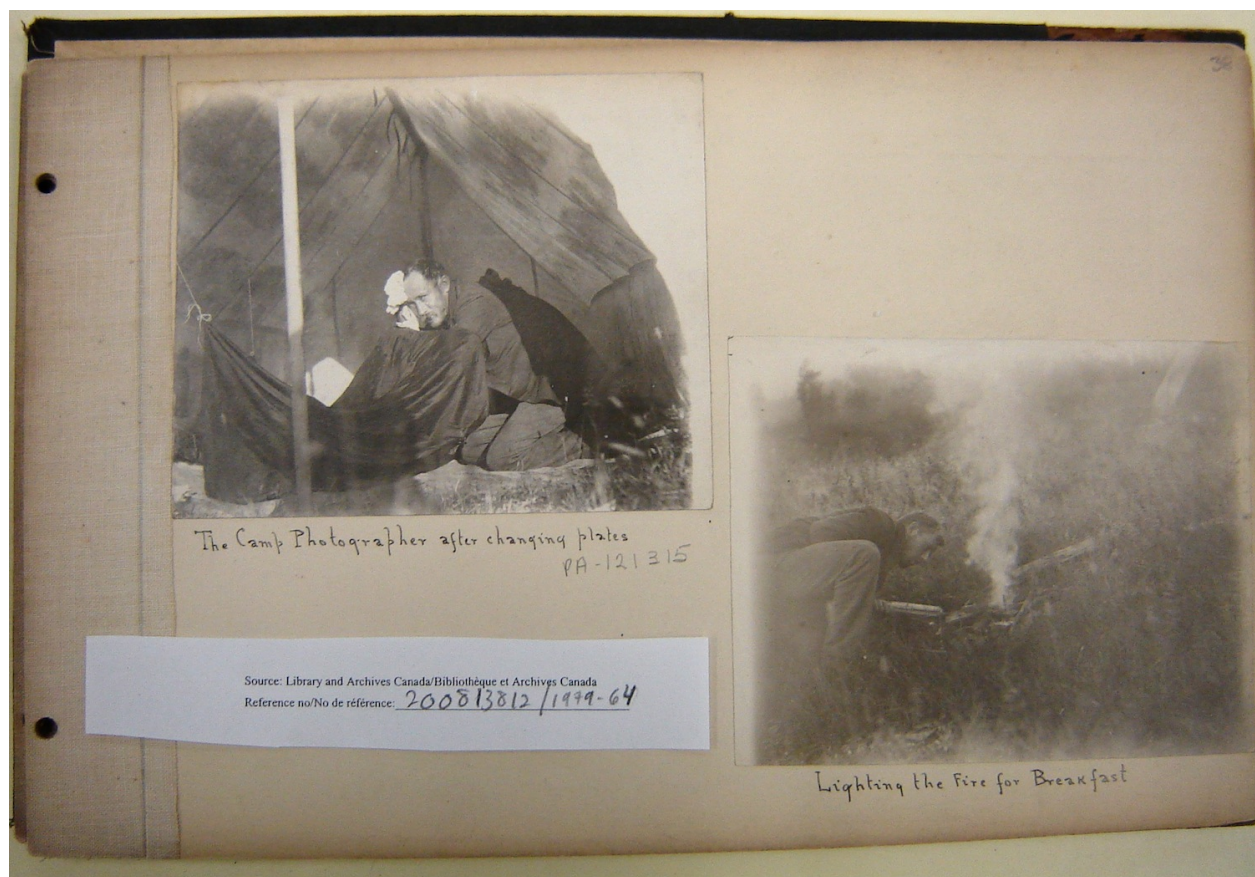
[http://collectionscanada.gc.ca/pam\\_archives/index.php?fuseaction=genitem.display!tem&lang=eng&rec\\_nbr=3191924](http://collectionscanada.gc.ca/pam_archives/index.php?fuseaction=genitem.display!tem&lang=eng&rec_nbr=3191924)>.

Quickly framed in the dead centre of the picture, emerging from a stuffy dark bag, and wiping his sweaty brow, University of Toronto Professor Dr. William Hodgson Ellis (1845–1920) is caught by his own camera during a canoe trip, just as he finishes reloading glass plates into their holders.<sup>3</sup> Identified as the photographer of the trip, he seems surprised and perhaps even annoyed to be the prey of the camera eye. But the person taking a portrait of Dr. Ellis also acknowledges that the souvenirs of the outdoor voyage have a maker who sweated over them. Portraying an amateur photographer changing plates, a task that leaves no visible trace on the final photograph, reminds us how little we pay attention to the making of photographs, in contrast to their subject.



Cover of the album.





The Camp Photographer after changing plates  
PA-121315

Source: Library and Archives Canada/Bibliothèque et Archives Canada  
Reference no/No de référence: 200813812/1999-64

Lighting the fire for Breakfast

The photograph in context.

Source: Library and Archives Canada/Bibliothèque et Archives Canada  
Reference no/No de référence: 200813812/1999-64



View up North River Lake Matagamashig



Early Morning on Wahnapitac Lake  
PA-121298

Additional photographs from the album.



Movie photographer and J. Dewey Soper, naturalist, taking photo of an Inuit man,  
1923-1929

Thomas Henry Tredgold (Canadian, 1896-1940)

Copy negative PA-207903

Library and Archives Canada / MIKAN 3591750

<[http://collectionsCanada.gc.ca/pam\\_archives/index.php?fuseaction=genitem.displayItem&lang=eng&rec\\_nbr=3591750](http://collectionsCanada.gc.ca/pam_archives/index.php?fuseaction=genitem.displayItem&lang=eng&rec_nbr=3591750)>.

Not only recording the making of both photography and cinematography, this picture, taken in 1923 by a Royal Canadian Mounted Police officer in Pond Inlet during the trial of an Inuit man for the murder of a white trader, gathers at once many problems of our relationship to photographs.<sup>4</sup> Captioned without regard for the two Inuit men standing on the left, and incorrectly interpreting the camera of naturalist Joseph Dewey Soper (1893–1982), setup with extended bellows for close-up, as an act of portraiture, this photograph makes visible the gestures behind documentary images that are too often erased in publication.<sup>5</sup> The relaxed, apparently collaborative, attitude between the men depicted nuances criticisms of early cultural descriptions as colonization and domination.<sup>6</sup> The photographic process, so often praised in terms of clarity and objectivity, is seen here to a fuller extent, one that includes the human hand.





Detail from the photo showing the movie camera.





Group of Eskimo hunters at Pond Inlet  
dressed mostly in the skins of seals--  
especially trousers and kumiks.

UNIVERSITY OF  
ALBERTA

Five Inuit Hunters, April 6, 1925

J. Dewey Soper (Canadian, 1893-1982)

Silver gelatin print

University of Alberta J. Dewey Soper Fonds / Item number 79-21-33-48

<[http://archive1.macs.ualberta.ca/asp/photo\\_main.aspx?ItemName=79-21-33-48](http://archive1.macs.ualberta.ca/asp/photo_main.aspx?ItemName=79-21-33-48)>.



Photograph of Ororeangnak at Nukuduk's Murder Trial, August 1, 1923

J. Dewey Soper (Canadian, 1893-1982)

Silver gelatin print

University of Alberta J. Dewey Soper Fonds / Item number 79-21-33-62

[http://archive1.macs.ualberta.ca/asp/photo\\_main.aspx?ItemName=79-21-33-62](http://archive1.macs.ualberta.ca/asp/photo_main.aspx?ItemName=79-21-33-62).



Women and children posing for George Valiquette during the trial. Louise Wood Collection. NAC-207811.

Picture reproduced in *Arctic Justice: On Trial for Murder, Pond Inlet, 1923* by Shelagh D. Grant, McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002.

<[http://www.amazon.ca/dp/0773523375/ref=rdr\\_ext\\_tmb](http://www.amazon.ca/dp/0773523375/ref=rdr_ext_tmb)>.



Woman photographer photographs female munitions worker at the Dominion Arsenals Plant, 24 Aug. 1942

Harry Rowed (Canadian, b. 1907)

Silver gelatin print

Library and Archives Canada / MIKAN 3196112

<[http://collectionsCanada.gc.ca/pam\\_archives/index.php?fuseaction=genitem.displayItem&lang=eng&rec\\_nbr=3196112](http://collectionsCanada.gc.ca/pam_archives/index.php?fuseaction=genitem.displayItem&lang=eng&rec_nbr=3196112)>.



A working document rather than a finished, published product, this photograph bears the trace of two photographers' hand at the same time. Depicting photographer Élyse Gagnon setting up what could be an identification portrait of Dominions Arsenal's munitions worker Céline Perry, this image also shows the cropping and perspective correction marks of National Film Board of Canada Still Photography Division photographer Harry Rowed.<sup>7</sup> The final image, after darkroom manipulations, opposes the light falling on Ms. Perry with the darkness of a plywood board, linked together by the working hand positioning it. Less an image of female empowerment than a study of contrast, this photograph connects together lightness and darkness, male and female, and the work preparatory to an exposure with that following it.<sup>8</sup>



Cropped and perspective-corrected version.



Profile view of photographer Michael "Miki" Berens at the Standish Hotel, ca. 1950

Photographer unknown

Silver gelatin print

Library and Archives Canada / MIKAN 3606796

[http://collectionsCanada.gc.ca/pam\\_archives/index.php?fuseaction=genitem.displayItem&lang=eng&rec\\_nbr=3606796](http://collectionsCanada.gc.ca/pam_archives/index.php?fuseaction=genitem.displayItem&lang=eng&rec_nbr=3606796).

Quickly grabbed, quickly processed, and printed unedited, this anonymous photograph unabashedly assumes a male point of view.<sup>9</sup> Pointing his large and heavy status symbol camera at his subject, he is unaware that its erected front panel reaches to the picture of a water nymph in rapt ecstasy.<sup>10</sup> A satisfied smile completes the light-hearted portrait of an unintentional Satyr. The amused, complicit eye of a fellow celebrity chaser, whose name and true intention archival posterity did not record, pictures here a photographer of exciting and glamorous jazz people, Michael Berens.<sup>11</sup> Themes of manly power, relative status and importance, and comradeship, run through the photograph, albeit undercut by a light satirical vein.



Portrait of Mike Robinson daguerreotyping Gabor Szilasi, 2003

Arnaud Maggs (Canadian, b. 1926)

Silver gelatin print, 27.94 x 35.56 cm

Library and Archives Canada / MIKAN 3608290

[http://collectionsCanada.gc.ca/pam\\_archives/index.php?fuseaction=genitem.displayItem&lang=eng&rec\\_nbr=3608290](http://collectionsCanada.gc.ca/pam_archives/index.php?fuseaction=genitem.displayItem&lang=eng&rec_nbr=3608290).



Unlike commercial or amateur photographers, artists recede less behind their subjects, and the discourses of intention and authorship may take over what craft can make visible. Three established artists work concurrently in this photograph to articulate together the intellectual and material aspects of the process of creation. Famous for his series of portraits, Arnaud Maggs uses the last three frames of a 35mm roll of Kodak Tri-X black and white film to portray Mike Robinson making a daguerreotype head shot of Gabor Szilasi, whose fame rests in large part on his sensitive representations of ordinary people.<sup>12</sup> Bracketing the entire history of photographic processes before the digital age, this triptych hovers between a portrait of photographers and of photography itself. Balancing between the individual and the collective, early and modern, single and multiple, art and craft, this deceptively simple work articulates a complex but cogent summary of the questions the practitioners of photography have asked themselves until now.



Daguerrotype of Gabor Szilasi produced during the portrait session photographed by Arnaud Maggs.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> For example, a photographer like Henri Cartier-Bresson made a point of not being portrayed to preserve the inconspicuousness in which he worked. The title of a recent exhibit at the Minneapolis Institute of Arts on portraits of photographers, *Facing the Lens* (2011), likewise underscores the confrontational aspect of the photographic lens, and suggests that the photographers there portrayed had to own up to their previous predations.

<sup>2</sup> See for example the portraits of Bill Brandt, Robert Frank, or Lynne Cohen by Sam Tata (in fond MIKAN 211289) for an example of the former.

<sup>3</sup> This photograph is part of an album of albumen prints in the Ellis fonds, documenting an 1896 canoe trip around Lake Temiskaming, Ontario. Based on the description of Dr. Ellis as "the camp photographer" on the album page, it is likely that he was the only photographer during the canoe trip. Furthermore, this photograph being part of the album, and of the same size as other photographs taken by Dr. Ellis during the trip, it is plausible that his own material was used here. The self-portrait hypothesis is at least one worth rejecting entirely, since the earliest patents for shutter self-timers, such as U.S. Patent No. 872333 and 690939, date from at least 1901.

<sup>4</sup> Biographical information on Joseph Dewey Soper indicates he travelled to the Arctic in 1924 for a two-year expedition:

In January 1923 Soper received an invitation from Dr. Anderson to work as a naturalist on the Federal Government's East Arctic Expedition. The voyage began aboard the C.G.S. Arctic and included Baffin, Beechey, Bylot, Devon, and Ellesmere Islands, Northern Greenland, and areas of Labrador. Commissioned to document the arctic flora and fauna, Soper returned from his first northern expedition with a "take" of 166 birds and mammals, a large number of plants, marine invertebrates, and "Eskimo articles" collected for the federal museum's Division of Ethnology.

The National Museum again retained Soper as a "junior naturalist" in 1924 for a two-year expedition to Baffin Island. By July 1924 the C.G.S. Arctic had taken Soper to his main camp at Pangnirtung, Cumberland Sound on Baffin Island where he stayed at a Royal Canadian Mounted Police base that also served as a centre of operations for the Hudson's Bay Company. The list of previously unexamined areas Soper explored and described in the first half of this second voyage included the south side of Nettilling Lake and the upper part of Koukdjuak River, Baffin Island. During the winter of 1924-25, Soper traversed Baffin Island from Cumberland Gulf to Foxe Channel. In his studies on this trip and throughout 1925 Soper improved and corrected Federal government charts and maps of the area and made ongoing environmental observations.

<<http://archive1.macs.ualberta.ca/FindingAids/JDSoper/JDSoper.html>>.

The J.D. Soper fonds shows images of the Thomas Henry Tredgold as early as 1923, and both men have common pictures of identical subjects. For instance, item number 79-21-33-60 by Soper, is a portrait of an Inuit man condemned for murder in Pond Inlet taken in August 1923 aboard the C.G.S. Arctic; MIKAN 3591754, in Tredgold's fond at Library and Archives Canada

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shows the same man aboard the C.G.S Arctic at the same date. Both photographs would have been taken at the same time by both men. This is during Soper's first voyage in the Arctic, as mentioned above.

Tredgold was also aboard the C.G.S. Arctic during the 1924 voyage, Soper's second, as related in a letter dated August 5, 1924 that is part of the Tredgold fond of Library and Archives Canada (MIKAN 102056):

Leaving Quebec at noon on the 5<sup>th</sup> of July the good ship "Arctic" steamed her way up the St. Lawrence at her usual speed of 10 knots per hr. Arriving at Father Point [Pointe-au-Père] on the evening of the 6<sup>th</sup> we dropped our Pilot and also Mr. J. D. Craig of the Dept. of the Interior.

He accompanied Soper during his 1925 explorations on Baffin Island, as related in a letter dated September 1, 1926, sent from the R.C.M.P. Cumberland Gulf Detachment, on Baffin Island:

Since February this year I have been so busy making Patrols and hunting Walrus, White Whale, and seal for dog feed in preparation for the coming winter [...] I arrived back from Nettilling Lake [Baffin Island] with Mr. J. D. Soper (Naturalist) last September after having a fairly good time in that region. We covered something like 650 miles altogether over mostly unexplored country and penetrated inland along the southern and western shores of Lake as far as the Koukjuak River, our farthest west then leaving only 40 miles from Fox Channel, but for the river current we would have made the crossing of Baffin Land there and then, also the freeze up the lake was not far distant, so we did not take any chances of being stranded away over there and headed straight back to "Home and Beauty?" Soper completed the job last Winter and made the crossing by dog train. On Feb. last the Sgt. And myself set out by dog team and made our way to the South Coast via Lake Nettilling, Amadjuak and Mingo[?] and proceeded eastwards along the coas as far as the H.B.C. fort at Lake Harbour. This proved to be a very hard trip because we ran out of dog deed and practically most of ours, and worst of all, beyond the sight of food & tarmigun[?], we did not meet a living thing for about 500 miles. . . . We were in a pretty poor state when we arrived at the H.B.C. Amadjuak Post. . . . It is quite possible an account of this trip will be printed in the official "Blue Book" this year. This can be obtained from the Government Printer at Ottawa for a few cents. The Sgt. (Sgt. White) went out this year so we have a new Corporal in charge, so will be making that Patrol again this winter, but we will be more prepared this time. . . . As regards to photographs I have quite a [large] assortment of negatives so can promise [you] a fine collection when I return, for the [pro]fessional printing can do more justice [than] I can to them. . . . I am afraid that too long a stay should embitter one against civilization, especially after one has been and observed the customs of such primitive people as the eskimo, when I look up on civilization, it appears to me as a being one great farce, yet it is only that thin veneer that keeps us from the primitive, it took centuries to build and yet can be shaken off in a moments notice, funny isn't it? Guess I'll sure come out next year.

The estimated year of 1923 for this photograph is inferred on the basis of the identity of the movie photographer, believed to be George Valiquette: "In 1922, 1923, and 1925, George



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Valiquette, who had experience shooting Canadian newsreel footage for the American-based Fox News, accompanied the Eastern Arctic Patrol” (Geller 39-40). “FOX NEWS” is visible on the side of the movie photographer’s camera, and other images from Library and Archives Canada, such as MIKAN 3223219 and 3223233 show a camera with similar features, identified as belonging to Valiquette.

The first Inuit man on the left of Tredgold’s picture resembles in many ways Oreangnak, who was an assistant to Nukudluk during his murder trial at Pond Inlet. Soper photographed him there twice, once in 1923 during the trial (79-21-33-62) and once in 1925 with other Inuit men, unidentified (79-21-33-48).

Finally, a picture of Inuit women and children, from the Louise Wood Collection (NAC-207811) and reproduced in the book *Arctic Justice: On Trial for Murder, Pond Inlet, 1923* by Shelagh D. Grant, (McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2002), shows the subjects beside George Valiquette’s camera, and a black dog that is ostensibly of the same race as the one pictured on Tredgold’s picture.

Since both Soper and Tredgold were in Pond Inlet in 1923 for the murder trial, Soper having been to Pond Inlet in 1925 again, that Oreangnak was pictured in both 1923 and 1925, and that Valiquette accompanied the EAP in both 1923 and 1925, and that he covered the murder trial in Pond Inlet, it is very likely that this picture was taken during the days of the trial. Since the Inuit man convicted of murder had killed a white person, trader Robert Janes, the trial would have been significantly newsworthy.

<sup>5</sup> For example, the photo-albums created by the Eastern Arctic Patrol were clearly attributed to their maker, but the same photographs were published unattributed in the press (Geller 42). A government endeavour to assert Canadian sovereignty over the Arctic Archipelago, the EAP “established and provisioned police posts, undertook scientific work, and nominally attended to Native health and welfare” (Geller 4).

The length of the bellows extending in front of J. Dewey Soper’s camera can indicate two possible things: either that the lens used is of a very long focal length, or that it is a normal lens focused very closely, as in macrophotography (close-up). If we posit that an adult’s hand such as Soper’s is about 12 cm (5 in) long, then the film format used in this camera should 10x12 cm (4x5 in), and the bellows is extended for about 200-250mm (8 to 10 in). If the lens were of such focal length, it would be focused at infinity. If the lens were of the normal length for this format (150mm / 6 in), then it would be focused for nearly 1:1 reproduction (requiring 300mm of bellows). At a 1:1 reproduction ratio, the largest item that can be reproduced would be 120mm (5in) large at best, the size of a human face. Since the camera is not pointed at the Inuit man’s face, but lower, it cannot picture the subject’s face, and is most likely focused on a particular item of clothing or adornment.

<sup>6</sup> For example, Edward Said in *Orientalism* (1978) questions how gathering knowledge about other cultures can participate in their imperialist domination (Armstrong 157).

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<sup>7</sup> Normally, a press camera (such as the then-ubiquitous Speed Graphic) allows for a fair amount of movements that allow optical corrections of perspective to be done at the moment of exposure. In the present case, either the shot was taken quickly to do so, or else it was taken with a camera not allowing such correction at the picture-taking stage, such as the equally popular Rolleiflex, as further suggested by the square format of the negative. In the darkroom, by lightly tilting the paper easel (onto which the negative is projected), the image undergoes a small amount of distortion that brings converging lines to become parallel.

<sup>8</sup> Ruth Roach Pierson, for instance, argues that World War II did not emancipate women, in the sense of giving them an equal share of power and status. Their work for the war effort was the result of a necessity rather than recognition of their rights (Pierson 25).

<sup>9</sup> The areas of the photograph close to the border are lighter in tone, and the wavy, unequal border of this zone indicates that the 10x12cm (4x5 in) negative was not properly agitated in the developer tray, following its immersion. The edges of the image received more developing solution, resulting in a denser negative in this area (thus a paler print). In addition, a large black spot in the upper right, a hole or a scratch in the negative, was left untouched, and the negative is printed full frame, that is including the dark border of the film.

<sup>10</sup> The press camera employed by Michael Berens is a model of Linhof Technika, a German camera concurrent to the more common American-made Graflex Speed Graphic. Unlike the Speed Graphic, which was built on a wooden frame, the still-manufactured Technika is entirely built of metal, costs much more, has more precise movements, and employs high quality lenses from the German optical firm Carl Zeiss. The raising of the lens panel is a perspective correction device that allows for Berens to aim through a viewfinder sitting atop his camera, allowing him to shoot more quickly. Because of the distance between the axis of the lens and the axis of the viewfinder, raising the lens board alleviates the resulting parallax error, ensuring that the picture taken more accurately reflects the image seen in the viewfinder.

<sup>11</sup> Michael Berens was at that moment a psychology student at the University of Ottawa, and lived for a while at the Standish Hall Hotel in Hull. He worked as the hotel photographer, and took pictures of not only the hotel's guests, but also the international jazz celebrities who played there: pictures of Jimmy Dorsey, Sarah Vaughan, Benny Goodman, Louis Armstrong, and Duke Ellington, among others, are available from his fonds (Library and Archives Canada, MIKAN 3684118).

<sup>12</sup> The daguerreotype, though not strictly speaking the first successful photographic process (Henry Fox Talbot's calotype was functional before François Arago gave Daguerre's process to the public in 1839), is nevertheless a convenient starting point for histories of photography since it was the first widespread process, due to its public nature. Talbot's process, though prior, was never as successful, being patented.

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