The McMichaels and The McMichael Canadian Art Collection

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Master of Museum Studies
Faculty of Information
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Abstract

The project is an event-based analysis of a group of pioneer objects held at the McMichael Canadian Art Collection. Using institutional records and published accounts, collecting and catalogueing activities are examined and present evidence of historical discrepancies in the treatment of these objects throughout the development of the. The project exposes how historical attitudes towards the pioneer objects categorically separated them from the original donation of the McMichael collection in 1965 and how institutional publications helped frame the growing collection as exclusivley art focused. Significant historical cataloguing activities and projects expose institutional discrepancies related to the treated and cataloguing of pioneer objects at the McMichael. As a whole, the project uses these historical discrepancies as part of a framework that begins to question the continued nature of the relationship of the pioneer objects to the McMichael given the institution’s current silence this element of its development and collection holdings.
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Chapter 1

Introduction

This project explores discrepancies between current perspectives on the development of the McMichael Canadian Art Collection, exemplified by Joan Murray’s introduction to *McMichael Canadian Art Collection: 100 Masterworks*, and the Collection’s historical records. What follows is an attempt to provide a contemporary view of the MCAC’s development by looking at areas where institutional records are largely silent on certain collecting practices and collection histories.

Guided by James Clifford’s (1994) history of collection methodology, significant moments in the MCAC’s collecting histories help to reconstruct various historical treatment of a category of items collectively labeled ‘pioneer objects’ held by the Institution. Relying on information sourced from archival and registration folders at the MCAC, as well as published materials focused on its collecting and institutional histories, the project demonstrates that current discussion of the collection’s historical development largely ignores the presence of the pioneer objects in the Collection. Building on the need to fill this gap, a discussion of select collection events not only highlights the historical presence of the PO at the MCAC, but also focuses on how collecting activities have shaped their relationship with the collection over the years.

To begin, Section 1.1 outlines the paper’s pioneer objects category which acts as the primary focus of the research. A detailed description of these objects provides a clear frame of reference for the interrogation of collection materials of interest and how exploring archival and institutional sources preserves a record of their presence, first in the McMichael’s private home and later at the MCAC. Sections 1.2 to 1.3 presents the project’s methods, temporal interest, theoretical lens and analytical approach. Section 1.4 wraps up Chapter 1 with brief introductions to the forthcoming chapters.

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1 The provincial institution currently known as the McMichael Canadian Art Collection, has historically held various titles: McMichael Conservation of Canadian Art (1965 to 1972), McMichael Canadian Collection (1972 to 1989), and McMichael Canadian Art Collection (MCAC) (1989 to present). The current name will be used throughout the project to refer to the institution. Additionally, terms such as “Institution”, “Collection” and “Gallery” are used interchangeably and act as occasional stand-ins for the McMichael Canadian Art Collection.
1.1 Pioneer Objects at the MCAC

The category of pioneer objects adopted here stems in large part from textual records that link images of early Euro-Canadians farm tools and domestic items to a ‘settler’ or ‘pioneer’ origin and aesthetic. These early sources include published magazine articles by Berton (1956), Newton (1964), and Smiter (1967). Their articles include photographs of the private home and collection of Robert and Signe McMichael and are associated with descriptions of a pioneer and/or settler nature. The category encompasses objects such as animal tethers, two-handed drawknives, wooden butter paddles, hand sickles, antique rifles and pistols, wrought-iron tools, ceramic jugs, tea pots and wooden yokes. Plates 1 and 2 provide examples of pioneer objects displayed within the McMichaels’ home.

Plate 2  Detail, photo depicting one of the McMichael’s many displays of Pioneer Objects throughout Tapawingo. Photo appears on page 10 in Berton’s 1956 article. Courtesy McMichael Canadian Art Collection.
Both images are instrumental in supporting textual references to Tapawingo, the name the McMichaels’ gave their home, as emitting a ‘pioneer image’ or ‘setting’. Plate 2 is published alongside Breton’s (1956) description of Tapawingo that reads: “[…] a striking room divider which sets the theme of the house. For here is the paraphernalia of pioneer days” (10). Plate 1 is featured in a similar fashion in Ann Newton’s 1964 article, Tapawingo. The image presents a more typical pioneer object display technique at Tapawingo where the objects are mounted on the highest wall beam. Hanging above works by Tom Thomson, Lawren Harris and others, a two-handed draw knife, (top left), axe (second from left), shoulder yoke (top right) and hand sickle (second from right) are all clearly visible. Here too, historical tools are discussed in connection to a pioneer aesthetic at Tapawingo. Newton writes: “Giant hemlock logs […] preserve the pioneer image in this modern style house. […][T]he living room […] is planked with random-width oak [,] [p]aintings are oil sketches by members of the Group of Seven [and] [p]ioneer implements are displayed along the topmost wall beam” (1964, 13). Here again historical objects inform the author’s overall interpretation of the McMichael’s home and the collection of objects are seen as “pioneer” objects.

The label pioneer objects (PO) in this context is intended to bring the various historical descriptions of these objects under one umbrella term. Research in the MCAC’s archive and registration folders found no evidence of a formal register, catalogue, or document that clearly defines and or lists the full extent of the MCAC’s PO holdings. As demonstrated above, there are examples where terms like ‘pioneer paraphernalia’ and ‘pioneer implements’ are used to describe an array of objects that share similar early Euro-Canadian origins. Additional descriptions of these objects in Breton and Newton also use general terms such as “artifacts” (Newton 1964, 13) and “early Canadiana” (Breton 1956, 10). Another good example of the lack of any standardized term for these objects displayed around Tapawingo is in the 1970 McMichael Canadian Conservation of Art catalogue. As part of the introduction to the collection, Paul Duval describes part of the collection housed at the Institution as “original settler material” (1970). In each case, the attribution of a settler or pioneer aesthetic and origin indicates no historical standard was

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2 The term ‘pioneer’ was choosen as the perfered descriptor for the project because it was the term most widely used throughout the original sources to described these objects. Its adoption speaks to a desire for consistency with early written descriptions of the items. Alternative descriptive terms like “Euro-Canadian”, and “settler” were considered but not employed because they did not appear in multiple early documents describing the objects.
developed to describe these objects. The pioneer objects label introduced here is intended to act as an umbrella term for these items.

Research at the MCAC identified records for pioneer objects on index cards in the MCAC’s registration offices. Filed in a two-drawer card cabinet, the Capital Items Index (CII), as seen in Plate 3, identifies items\(^3\) from Tapawingo (or nearly identical items) depicted and/or described in archival photographs and texts. These items include: wooden shoulder yoke (CII card number

![Plate 3 Image of a CII catalogue card raised above other cards housed in the CII cabinet. The raised card is card #233 and identifies a wooden shoulder yoke. Image courtesy of the author.](image)

\(^3\) The CII also includes records for glassware, brass lamps and McMichael furniture donated to the Collection. Objects that while are not the focus of this project, do factor into some of its discussions.
#233 – as seen in the top right of Plate 2), wooden butter paddle (CII card number #1023), draw knife (CII card number #230), wooden goat tether (CII card number #181), sickle (CII card number #398), black iron fire shovel (CII card number #198) and seven antique guns (CII card number #948). It is important to note that physical observation of these objects during research at the MCAC was not possible; in discussion with the MCAC’s registrar, it was determined that PO identified in the CII catalogue were likely in long-term storage and physically locating and examining these objects was not feasible. As a result, all information regarding PO in this study stems strictly from the historical documentation introduced above and the additional sources presented throughout this paper4.

1.1 Project Design

While a more robust discussion of the collecting theories framing this project are outlined in the next chapter, it is necessary to quickly introduce core concepts from works by James Clifford (1994) and Susan Pearce (1998) in order to properly frame the project’s main thesis and overall design.

The project proposes a research design that reconstructs four significant Events that highlight fluctuations in the MCAC’s treatment of PO. Clifford provides a useful theoretical guide for the identification of moments within a collection’s development. Methodologically, Clifford (1994) stresses the identification and analysis of “powerful discriminations made at particular moments,” in order to expose the ideological foundations that underline the value systems regulating the interpretation of collection objects (261). He argues that critical analysis of these practices is pivotal in understanding how these collecting events reconstruct the value of objects (261). More importantly, Clifford stresses that his methods help expose the subjective nature of collections, demonstrating that their construction and values are malleable and change over time.

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4 After the initial research for this project was complete at the MCAC, the author was briefly employed by the MCAC and given the opportunity to enter one of the long-term storage rooms where some PO and McMichael’s furniture were stored. The visit to the storage room proved too short for any significant study of the objects found, but did at least confirm the continued presence of PO at the MCAC.
In other words, his methods expose the subjective nature of a collection’s meaning(s) through the analysis of the moments that shape or alter them.

Pearce (1998) demonstrates that much of contemporary collections research has shifted from an analysis of the taxonomic structures of a collection (e.g., what the collection represents) to the processes associated with collecting. This shift is significant because it suggests the value in collections research is in the analysis of collecting as an acquisitive activity, but one that also frames the meaning of a collection (6-10). In this light, Pearce suggests new collections research should focus more on assessing the various factors that shape the development of collections, enabling better analysis of the underlying influences that often go unexamined (8-10).

In sum, framed by Clifford’s methods and Pearce’s arguments, the project asks:

How can collecting theory help explain the absence of pioneer objects in the McMichael Canadian Art Collection’s current understanding of its origins and development?

1.2 Research Considerations

The project takes a chronological approach to the organization of the collecting events identified below. This chronology focuses on a period of time framed by the collecting events which occurred between 1965 and 1981. These dates are significant because the former represents the year in which the McMichaels donated their land, home, and collection of art to the Province of Ontario, thereby inaugurating the MCAC. The later date represents a moment in the Collection’s development when the PO were finally catalogued as part of the CII and the project’s fourth and final collecting Event. This is a useful end date for the project’s analysis of PO because it coincides with the departure of the McMichaels from the day-to-day management of the collection, as well as corresponding with a major inventory of the collection that prompted the creation of the CII.

1.3 Organizational Overview

Chapter one provides an in-depth introduction to key persons and documents that have shaped the project. Robert and Signe McMichael and the MCAC are introduced and discussed at length.
Joan Murray’s introduction in 100 Masterworks is examined and carefully considered from a pioneer object point of view. Her description of the Collection’s growth and development is a key document and is used to establish the project’s argument that the contemporary views of the Collection do not recognize PO as part of its development. A brief analysis of the MCAC’s website will show Murray’s interpretation of the collection’s development remains the dominant institutional narrative. Next, a discussion of Clifford’s critical history of collections theory clarifies and completes the description of the theoretical framework guiding the project’s analyses of the collecting events. It also includes a discussion of broader collecting theory by Susan Pearce and Russell Belk that support the paper’s theoretical framework and methodological approach. Finally, a literature review of published and unpublished MCAC research will introduce alternative views to Murray’s description of the MCAC’s development.

Chapter two introduces Event 1, the 1965 donation agreement, as a moment in the Collection’s development that systematically separated the PO from the McMichaels’ broader art collecting activities. The analysis highlights the relative absence of pioneer objects from the donation’s written provisions while photographic evidence shows the display of the PO at Tapawingo remained unchanged after the transfer to the Province. The event looks closely at the written Agreement between the McMichaels and the Ontario government, and argues that in order to understand the apparent absence of the PO in the 1965 Agreement, it is necessary to assume the PO were perceived as elements of Tapawingo’s pioneer atmosphere and aesthetic, and not collection objects proper. Baudrillard’s (1996) analysis of the Western approach to objects as tools in the development of atmosphere and space will contribute to the analysis of the 1965 Agreement.

Chapter three traces the representation of Pioneer Objects through the Collection catalogues published in 1970, 1973, and 1976. More specifically, Event 2 is a detailed description of the PO in publications and include a comparison of First Nations and Inuit art also introduced in the catalogues between 1970 and 1976. The analysis demonstrates the observable change in the treatment of these two groups of objects within the collection catalogues published by the MCAC. Furthermore, it notes the shift in the evaluation and classifications of the Indigenous material and PO within the publications. Analysis of the design of the Collection catalogues exposes ideological assumptions about the MCAC’s perception of these areas of the Collection. Through careful consideration of the design of the catalogues, this Event suggests the catalogues
represent a clear attempt to distinguish and amplify particular elements of the Collection.

Chapter four focuses on the archival records outlining the 1975 donation of various pioneer objects by the McMichaels to MCAC Collection. Using Board of Trustee minutes, Event 4 introduces registration practices that show clear procedural discrepancies between the acquisition and registration of art and pioneer objects at the MCAC. The Event outlines how registration records at the MCAC imply categorical distinctions between objects in the Collection.

Chapter five presents Event 4 as a major institutional reorganization of the pioneer objects within the Collection. Following a major facility renovation and inventory, the MCAC established the CII as a catalogue for various donated materials as well as pioneer objects held by the Institution. The discussion investigates how the renovation and inventory projects shaped the development of the Capitol Items Index. Event 5 represents a careful chronological description of the institutional overhaul during this volatile period at the MCAC and argues it has had a lasting influence on the status of PO at the Institution.

Finally, a brief conclusion will summarize insight gained from the individual analyses of the collecting events and provide an overall assessment of the project. Additional questions developed over the course of the research are introduced and open the door for further research of the Collection.
Chapter 2

Literature Review

The literature review establishes the project’s theoretical lens and introduces relevant research on the MCAC. The McMichaels’ personal histories provide a window into the origins of the collection and explain why the collection continues to be housed in a facility that grew out of the McMichaels’ home in Kleinburg, Ontario. Further analysis of Murray’s 2006 introduction demonstrates the contemporary absence of PO from the Institution’s published perspectives on the McMichaels’ collecting interests and their continued presence at the MCAC. After a description of some of the contextual factors informing the paper, works by Clifford (1994), Pearce (1994, 1998) and Belk (2006) establish the theoretical foundations framing the study. Finally, unpublished and published documents provide additional support that alternative perspectives on the Collection’s development exist. The silence surrounding PO supports the project’s position that filling the gap in contemporary perspectives on the pioneer objects provides insight into the MCAC’s development absent in other collection histories.

2.1 Robert and Signe McMichael

As founders of the collection, Robert and Signe McMichael’s influence on the various aspects of the MCAC is substantial. During the 1950s, the McMichaels developed broad collecting interests. These interests ranged from PO, oil paintings by Tom Thomson, Indigenous art, and even historical prints from the late 19th Century (Berton 1956, 10). Nevertheless, most published accounts of the McMichaels’ collecting typically focuses on their passion for paintings by Tom Thomson and the Group of Seven. The exact dates of the origin of their collecting activities is unknown, but there are three different possibilities. Early collection catalogues indicate the McMichaels began collecting art in 1953 with the purchase of a Harris and Thomson, however, later Institutional publications indicate that these paintings were in fact purchased in 1955 (Murray 2006, 4). On the other hand, pioneer object collecting began sometime between 1951 and 1956 (McMichael 1986, 27). These collecting interests developed quickly and by 1960 the art collection had grown to roughly 50 art works (Dowsett 1972, 5). By the time the McMichaels donated their collection to the Province of Ontario, their collection of art more than tripled to 161
two-dimensional works\(^5\). However, when you include collected items such as PO and indigenous material collected by the McMichaels, the scale of the collecting grows even larger. It is important to note that historical records do not support a definite origin date to the McMichaels’ collecting; rather they point to a period during the early- to mid-1950s when the McMichaels began to actively develop a broad collection of art and artifacts.

Speaking of Robert McMichael in her book *Confessions of a Curator*, Murray suggests Robert was a controversial figure within Canadian Art collecting circles. She describes his collecting as idiosyncratic, yet foundational for Canadian art history\(^6\) (Murray 1996, 63). Murray does not explain what makes the McMichaels’ collecting so peculiar, except that their approach to collecting ultimately focused on achieving an extraordinary collection, no matter the obstacle (65-66). Interestingly, Murray’s discussion of the McMichaels also suggested their aggressive collecting style and the vision behind it played a part in the latter struggle for control at the gallery\(^7\).

Robert and Signe McMichael began their collecting activities while running a photography studio in Toronto. As an entrepreneurial wedding photographer, Robert McMichael’s success came from promoting a wedding product he called a “Bridal Shower Pak” (Murray 2006, 4), among other “Pak” variants (McMichael 1986, 49-55). The success of these promotional packages led Robert to the United States where he could tap into a much larger market (McMichael 1986, 128). The business was indeed lucrative and by the time the McMichaels’ began the donation of their collection and home, Robert McMichael was in the process of selling the business to focus solely on assisting Signe with their growing collection (McMichael 1986, 151).

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\(^5\) The 161 total is based on the number of works listed in “Section C” of the 1965 donation agreement between the McMichaels, the Province of Ontario and the Metro Toronto Regional Conservation Authority. For more information on the document and its origins, see Chapter three.

\(^6\) Murray’s ruminations on McMichael’s impact on Canadian art credits his dedication to Canadian art with the AGO’s establishment of a curator of Canadian Art at the institution (Murray 1996, 59).

\(^7\) For more discussion of the circumstances leading to Robert McMichael’s resignation see Event 5. For a summary of his legal struggles to regain control of the collection see Sidey, 2012.
During this time the McMichaels decided they wanted to move out of Toronto and establish a residence in the small town of Kleinburg. In the spring of 1952, they purchased ten acres of land at the back of an old farm pasture (McMichael 1986, 17). Located approximately 30-minutes northwest of Toronto, the McMichaels’ spent the next two years constructing a modern equivalent of a log cabin on their newly acquired plot of land. In an attempt to imbue their new home with a sense of age and permanence, their wall timbers were scavenged from old barns in “[t]he northern parts of Albion and Mono townships” (McMichael 1986, 21). Construction of Tapawingo began sometime in late 1952, and was completed in early 1955 (1986, 27). With the help of architect Leo Venchiarutti, the McMichaels designed and constructed a four room structure using locally sourced, structural materials for the load-bearing walls and fireplace. By making strategic use of modern construction materials and techniques (Berton 1956, 12), Tapawingo also included a full south-facing glass wall that helped illuminate the main living space (McMichael 1986, 20).

As mentioned earlier, by the mid-1950s, the McMichaels had already begun actively collecting oil paintings by Thomson and the members of the Group of Seven. Tapawingo quickly became a dedicated gallery space for their growing collecting ambitions. In 1963, the growth of their collection forced the McMichaels to build the first addition to their home to act as extra gallery space (Duval 1973, 6). Early additions were constructed to maintain and preserve the McMichaels original cabin aesthetic throughout the gallery (Dowsett 1972, 6).

### 2.2 Institutional origins of the McMichael Canadian Art Collection

According to various institutional accounts, the transition of the McMichaels’ private collection to the province stems from growing public interest beginning of the 1960s. For example, the 1967 MCAC catalogue mentions the McMichaels welcomed curious individuals into their home to view their art collection as early as 1960 (Duval 1967). By 1965, the McMichaels approached the province of Ontario with the idea of a major donation that would institutionalize the public’s access to their collection. At least two sources suggest the McMichaels always intended to

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institutionalize their home and art collection for the benefit of the public (McMichael 1986, 144 and Murray 2006, 4). Robert McMichael says they initially considered opening their collection under the auspices of the National Gallery of Canada. The National Gallery declined, citing the fact that their constitution did not permit the establishment of satellite facilities (McMichael 1986, 145). Nevertheless, their home and collection garnered great interest with the Metropolitan Toronto and Regional Conservation Authority (MTRCA), an arms-length corporation of the Ontario provincial government. The MTCRA was the product of the amalgamation of four smaller municipal conservation authorities responsible for the conservation and management of land surrounding important watersheds. The MTRCA took interest in the McMichaels vision, in large part because the organization operated a conservation area directly adjoining the McMichaels’ property (145). However, the MTRCA mandate did not authorize the organization to operate an art gallery, so they were unable to initially act on their interest (145).

On May 20, 1964, the McMichaels decided to write to the Premier of Ontario, John Robarts, in the hopes of securing support for their dream of a public gallery. Robarts responded with interest, and the negotiations to transfer Tapawingo and the McMichaels’ art collection to the Province began. Interestingly, the McMichaels had the support of the MRTCA when they wrote to John Robarts with the proposal. The MCAC archives show that a letter of support written by the MTRCA’s Chairman, G. Ross Lord, dated May 13 1964, also appeared on the Premier’s desk extolling the merits of the McMichaels’ idea. The MTRCA the letter indicates the corporation was willing to act as a trustee for the donation. Robert McMichael’s letter to Premier Robarts also mentions the MTRCA’s interest in the proposal, assuring the Premier that the MTRCA’s corporate framework could easily accept his donation and integrate their property,

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9 As of 1997, the MTRCA formally changed their name to the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority. MTRCA is used throughout this project in order to align itself with the historical title and to maintain a level of consistency throughout the paper (Toronto & Region Conservation Authority. “About Us”, http://www.onvaughan.com/trca. Retrieved Jan 21, 2015). This link is now broken, for access to site see the Internet Archive’s version: https://web.archive.org/web/20120428235033/http://www.onvaughan.com/trca.

home, and art collection into their operations. An agreement was signed in 1965, and in July of 1966 the McMichael Canadian Conservation of Art opened to the public (About us - McMichael.com).

Presently, the MCAC’s collection includes approximately 6,000 artworks from across the country, with a particular temporal focus on art produced in the 20th Century up to the present (McMichael Canadian Art Collection). The Collection now includes a diverse holding within Canadian art well beyond the initial Group of Seven collecting emphasis. In addition, current legislation ensures the organization continues to collect and display a wide range of Canadian art. Bill 188, McMichael Canadian Art Collection Amendment Act, 2011 passed by the Legislative Assembly of Ontario formally recognizes the institution’s commitment to contemporary and Indigenous Art. Section 9. (1) of the bill affirms the MCAC’s mandate to collect contemporary Canadian, First Nations, Inuit and Métis artists (Legislative Assembly of Ontario).

2.3 Absence of PO in Contemporary Discussions of the MCAC’s Collecting Histories

Published in 2006, and coinciding with her time as CEO and Director of the MCAC (Murray 2006, back cover), McMichael Canadian Art Collection: 100 Masterworks showcases 100 works held by the MCAC and deemed to represent works in the collection of exceptional artistic achievement (Murray 2006, 1). General descriptions aside, the publication's four-page introduction entitled ‘Robert and Signe McMichael: Their Vision’, is the most significant portion of the document to this research. Using archival photographs, excerpts from McMichael's 1986 biography, and institutional history, Murray briefly traces the development of the collection from the McMichaels’ private collecting in the 1950s and 60s, to the establishment of the MCAC as a

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11 McMichaels’ letter appears to contradict his 1986 account of the MRTCA’s reasons for refusing the McMichaels’ proposal discussed just prior. However, little is known regarding the initial proposal. It seems entirely plausible that through their early discussions it was possible to reconfigure the nature or premise of the McMichaels’ donation to not contravene the MRTCA’s mandate. Further research in to the early relationship between the MRTCA and the McMichaels is needed.
pivotal institution for Canadian Art. Echoing several collection catalogues\textsuperscript{12}, Murray (2006) suggests the McMichaels’ art collecting originates with their purchase of *Montreal River* by Lawren Harris, in 1955, followed by Tom Thomson’s *Pine River* shortly thereafter (4). Furthermore, Murray notes that the McMichaels amassed approximately 194 paintings exclusively by Canadian artists in just over 10 years of collecting. Her introduction subsequently transitions to a description of the 1965 negotiation and transfer of the McMichaels’ collection to

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{image.png}
\caption{Robert and Signe photographed in their second living room at Tapawingo in 1965. As part of their first addition to their home in 1963, this additional space was put to use as gallery for their growing collection. Courtesy of the McMichael Canadian Art Collection.}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{12} In particular, the 1976, 1979 McMichael Canadian Collection catalogues and the 1989 McMichael Canadian Art Collection catalogue.
the province, positioning the agreement as a natural evolution for the collection, and a process that had always driven the McMichaels to further their collecting (4-5). In all, the introduction acts as a “tribute” to the McMichaels’ dedication to the development of the Collection and institution that bears their name (2006, 5).

*100 Masterworks* was published after a difficult period for the MCAC. The 1990s and early 2000s marks a time when litigation and political influence initiated a dramatic fight between the McMichaels and the MCAC administration over control and policy at the Collection (Sidey 2012, 1). After the courts denied the McMichael’s claim that the MCAC administration was in breach of the original 1965 agreement, the Provincial government implemented legislation restricting the collecting activities of the institution and reinstated the McMichaels to prominent positions at the Institution (Sidey 2012, 15). With Robert McMichael’s passing in 2003 and Signe’s failing health (CBC News), Murray’s publication in 2005 appears to have brought some closure to this chapter in the Collection’s history. Her introduction appears to recognize the McMichaels as seminal figures in the institution’s establishment while minimizing the struggles over control of the collection.

Although Murray’s monograph focuses on 100 significant works of art at the MCAC, an early photograph of the McMichaels and part of their collection captures pioneer objects hanging above works by Harris and Milne. Described as “The Varley Gallery,” Plate 4 depicts Robert McMichael standing by their second fireplace reading, with Signe seated to his left and tending to their dogs (Murray 2006, 2). With the intimacy of a domestic snapshot, signaled by the McMichaels’ relaxed poses and apparent disinterest in interacting directly with the camera, the image suggests the McMichaels are comfortably at home and oblivious of the viewer peering into a private moment. The image is composed in such a way that works from their collection of art are clearly visible on the wall behind them. The photograph highlights how the McMichaels once hung their collection in a way that combined pioneer artifacts and art, a configuration that resists pretensions of a collection solely focused on collecting art objects.

Ignoring the photographic evidence of the pioneer objects acquired by the McMichaels, Murray’s narrative and the historical image presents the McMichaels as uniquely art collectors. Certainly, Murray’s focus on the art in the collection is in line with the premise of her book; however, as alluded to several times already, her reading of the image and her framing of the
McMichael’s early vision of their collection is nevertheless selective. This becomes more apparent when the viewer is made aware of the objects hanging directly above the works of art in Plate 4. Similar to Plate 1, the image depicts various PO mounted on the wall’s topmost beam, hanging directly above paintings by various Group of Seven members and other Canadian artists sought after by the McMichaels. The striking similarities in the art and PO displays seen in Plate 4 and Plate 1 demonstrate that this type of display is not unique to a single image and reflects a very early McMichael interest in juxtaposing pioneer objects alongside their art.

Robert McMichael himself wrote briefly about the PO and their display in their home in his 1986 autobiography *One Man’s Obsession*: “Along the length of the highest timbers in our living room walls we mounted flat iron tools and implements from pioneer days, which we had rescued from local barns and auction sales” (p.27). Such a display of tools and items at Tapawingo, McMichael explains later in the paragraph, was meant to “provide a harmonious counterpoint to
the hewn, textured surface of the old logs” in the walls.

Murray’s (2006) silence towards the PO is mirrored by MCAC website page entitled *About Us – Our History*. Cropped in a banner-like fashion common to many websites, the image of the McMichaels in Plate 5 is cropped so that the dogs are no longer visible and neither are the PO mounted above the art. The decision by the MCAC to use an image that had previously been published in its larger format suggests a desire to exclude elements of the original image and reinforce the relationship between the McMichaels and their art on the walls behind them. The accompanying text also appears to reaffirm this inclination. The website states that inside their "pioneer-style" home, “the McMichaels began collecting works of art by Tom Thomson and the Group of Seven [...] launching what would become a lifetime objective [...] to build a remarkable collection dedicated to the work of Canadian artists” (McMichaels Canadian Art Collection). This statement champions art collecting over all of the McMichaels’ other pursuits, framing the McMichaels’ collecting as a project focused solely on the acquisition of art.

When compared to Plate 4, Plate 5 removes the objects mounted on the top wall beam above the artworks and the intimacy often accorded to a home environment. While it may simply have been a formatting decision, excluding the dogs, chairs, and pioneer objects symbolically narrows the Institution’s relationship to the McMichaels and prioritizes their connection to the development of a Canadian art collection. The website does not make any mention of the pioneer objects and the historical perspective on the collection’s development appears to align with Murray’s 2006 introduction.

It is possible that the struggle for control of the MCAC in the decade before *100 Masterworks* caused the institution to downplay the McMichaels broader collecting interests, but the consequence is a gap in the understanding of the MCAC’s actual collection origins and development. There is an apparent contradiction between the long-standing presence of the PO at the MCAC, and the absence of any contemporary recognition of these objects as part of the histories that have shaped the collection held in trust by the MCAC today. It is this gap between the published perspectives and the evidence of the PO’s presence at the MCAC that propels the

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13 Plate 4 was also published in Smiter (1967).
research.

2.4 Collecting Theory

2.4.1 James Clifford

Clifford’s (1994) ‘history of collections’ theory provides a suitable theoretical framework because it stresses an historical approach to the investigation of fluctuations in the treatment and perceived values of objects in Western collections. As a method of historical inquiry, it aims to highlight historical changes in the relative value of objects in collections and focuses on interpreting “powerful discriminations” present in the historical records (261). It is important to note that Clifford defines discrimination within a collecting context as a product of “western subjectivity” most often expressed in the form of fluctuations, or changes in the collecting institution’s approach to and treatment of a particular segment of a collection (261). Clifford's understanding of a general system of objects stems, in large part, from Baudrillard’s 1968 book and analysis of the West’s “capitalist ‘system of objects’”14 (261). For Clifford, Baudrillard’s theories represent a keen insight into how the accumulation and reorganization of objects establishes new parameters in determining their value. In other words, the gathering and reorganization of objects under a “structured environment” (eg., collections, interior design) in fact supplants the previous realities of the objects and reassigns them value relative to their new realities within their new context (261).

Clifford’s (1994) analysis of patterns in Western historical collecting suggests that Western collecting institutions typically approach objects by classifying them in one of two categories: ethnographic or art objects (262). He argues that these terms also come to represent an approach to collecting founded on either scientific or aesthetic assumptions and that these assumptions have real consequences in the display and value attributions of objects in collections (264). According to Clifford, an aesthetic approach values the expression of individual creativity (264) and originality (265). Display techniques used to reinforce these aesthetic values apply formalist protocols (263), typically ignore an object’s “place in everyday cultural practice,” and attributes little significance to an object’s “essential meaning” (264-265). Conversely, an ethnographic or

14 For a more in depth discussion of Baudrillard’s system of objects see Chapter three.
scientific approach prompts an assignation of value relative to an object’s perceived cultural significance (265). From this perspective, display and collecting practices tend to emphasize a similarity of function between objects, and usually group objects based on cultural distinctions (264).

Lastly, it is important to note that Clifford’s goal in his article was to highlight how his theories could help explain the way Western collecting typically assimilated non-Western objects into foreign value systems. His history of collection methodology nevertheless remains a suitable approach to the study of PO in large part because Clifford himself points out his theory has potential application in a study similar to this one. In evaluating the potential of his history of collections as an approach to understanding various historical patterns and fluctuations in Western collecting, he asks: “How are ‘antiquities’, ‘curiosities’ […] ‘ethnographic artefacts’ distinguished –at different historical moments and in specific market conditions?” (Clifford 1994, 261). By including notions of antiquities and curiosities alongside his mention of ethnographic artefacts, it appears that Clifford subtly suggests that objects of a Western nature in collections might also benefit from his theoretical framework.

2.4.2 Susan Pearce

There is a useful distinction to be made between ‘collection’ and ‘collecting.’ In common parlance, the term collection typically refers to a group of objects gathered together by a collector. Conversely, collecting is generally used to characterize acts associated with gathering objects to create a collection. What makes this difference important for this study is how Susan Pearce argues collection and collecting studies have different epistemological foundations and that these differences influence the research into these areas. A brief summary of Susan Pearce’s article The urge to collect (1994) and the introduction to her study of contemporary collecting in Britain (1998) will establish the fundamental assumptions that distinguish these two approaches.
Pearce writes: “the relevant writers have, collectively, shown us how to think not about the surface social practice – as the use of objects – shows the world, but about the processes which support the practice” (1998, 8). Pearce’s comment implies that traditional collection studies were typically preoccupied with the study of how an object’s use or perceived social function (the “surface social practice”) were traditionally used as the basis for collections research. According to Pearce, this approach does not consider the various processes that bring these objects together as collections, in other words, the acts of accumulation of objects necessary for a ‘surface’ reading of objects in collections to occur. The transition from a collection to a collecting studies approach represents a shift from the analysis of particular commonalities

![Table 1]

Table 1 Copy of Pearce’s table comparing the shift of focus from collections to collecting.
between objects in a collection, to the study of exactly how various activities connected to collecting frame how we perceive these surface relationships between objects in collections.

Table 1 expresses this shift by juxtaposing columns that describe the general qualities of collection versus collecting studies, and articulates the implications of research that follows either a collection or collecting focus. Applying this analysis to the 1973 MCAC catalogue exemplifies a collection study. Descriptions of the collection and Tapawingo are treated as historical fact and objectively authoritative (Duval 1973, 6). Additionally, the catalogue’s reproduction of works from the collection prioritizes the collection holdings with little mention of acquisition and the processes that shape collection development. Comparing these observations of the MCAC catalogue to Table 1, the catalogue is a type of collection study. The authoritative tone throughout the introduction coupled with the catalogue’s design emphasizes the collection’s content and favours a descriptive rather than explanatory approach to the collection.

Russell Belk’s *Collector and Collecting* (2006) explores the various consumerist characteristics connected to collecting. Using both contemporary and historical examples of the ways people develop collections, Belk highlights how it’s possible to attribute historical surges in collecting to moments of exceptional economic expansion (536). For example, the European phenomenon of the *Wunderkammer* during the 16th and 17th centuries is linked to new channels of trade between Europe, Asia, and the Americas (536). For Belk, these *Wunderkammer* represent a consumerist response to European encounters with other civilizations through the expanding trade around the world. Acting as material encyclopedias of the ever-expanding European understanding of the world beyond its borders, these collections brought together disparate artifacts of the exotic world and reflected “a fascination with the Other in contrast to the European self” (536). In short, rather than concentrating on trying to piece together an understanding of the links between these disparate objects in *Wunderkammer*, Belk suggests their significance is in the way they help explain how European’s reacted to their new economic realities.

Thinking back to Pearce’s key theoretical difference between collection and collecting studies, Belk’s study is firmly rooted in a collecting studies framework. Using a historical consumerist framework, Belk uses the study of collections to explore underlying social practices behind the
way *Wunderkammer* function as collections. It is this fundamental interest in the study of social factors associated with the development of collections that separates collection studies like the 1973 MCAC catalogue and Belk’s *Collectors and Collecting*.

Duval and Belk provide examples of both collection and collecting studies. This study of the pioneer objects at the MCAC aligns with a collecting studies approach as found in Belk’s work, as the focus is on highlighting how various social (in this case institutional) practices inform the way the MCAC’s collection is interpreted and valued. Like Belk’s analysis of the influence of trade on the development of *Wunderkammer*, the analysis of the various collecting Events at the MCAC will track the way institutional practices have contributed to the PO’s absence from current MCAC histories. It is important, however, to point out that the study of the PO at the MCAC is somewhat different than Belk and Pearce’s studies because both represent rather broad collecting analyses that aggregate collecting data from numerous collections in order to identify broad social phenomena that contribute to the development of collections within a society. Rather than illuminating broader social practices associated with collecting, this paper modestly focuses on investigating how underlying institutional practices influenced the current understanding of the PO at the MCAC.

Returning to Clifford, it is possible to interpret his critical history of collection methods in a way that aligns it with Pearce’s defining characteristics of a collecting study. Consider for example Clifford’s interest in exposing the “subjectivity” in Western collecting. By focusing research on important moments throughout a collection’s history, Clifford’s method highlights institutional and cultural practices that shape and determine relative value within a collection (261). Clifford’s interest in exploring how institutional practices play a role in defining collections can fall under the “field of inquiry” and “interest in form and style” characteristics found in Table 1. Even though Clifford’s method relies on historical research, the motive behind looking to the historical records is informed by an interest in better understanding how institutional practices alter over time. Clifford’s interests closely align with Pearce’s collecting studies approach that focuses on the underlying “processes that support” and shape a subsequent ‘surface’ reading of objects in collections studies (Pearce 1998, 8).
2.5 Alternative Historical Analyses

Four notable studies on institutional administration and development of the MCAC collection will now be examined. These articles present research on the MCAC that utilize alternative approaches to understanding and interpreting the Collection and Institution. Their significance for this project is twofold. First, they underscore the virtual absence of any historical analysis of the PO at the MCAC, within both official institutional publications (Murray 2006; McMichael Canadian Art Collection website) as well as external historical analyses. Secondly, each article highlights how various institutional, governmental and legal practices have shaped the institution over time and provides further support for the study’s methodological approach.

For example, Pamela Sidey’s (2012) article positions the development of the acquisition policy at the MCAC as a response to the legal battle between the McMichaels and the MCAC during the 1990s. The article usefully unpacks the legislation and legal documents that came to define the MCAC’s approach to collecting. Sidey’s interest in the changing acquisition policy at the MCAC over the course of its history is important because it helps structure her understanding of the McMichaels’ grievances brought to the courts in the 1990s (12-15). Furthermore, it also helps frame her discussion of the political controversy that brought the Collection’s acquisition policy back to the public’s attention in 2000 (15-21). It is a powerful example of Clifford’s argument that collecting interests are inherently malleable and change overtime. By describing the various iterations of the acquisition policies at the MCAC over the years, Sidey’s chronological approach to the development of the acquisition policy and power struggles at the MCAC demonstrates that Clifford’s theory is directly applicable to the MCAC.

Another important work that outlines alternative approaches to the MCAC’s development is the unpublished report prepared by four students from the Willowbank School of Restoration Arts. Described as a “Cultural Landscape” analysis, the report is broken into four separate studies.

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15 A cultural landscape approach is defined by the report as investigating “the site as a whole, in its larger environmental and social context, as both a physical place and a set of experiences of that place. […] [R]each activities attempt to discover cultural values attached to the place, and to help define them” (Smith et al., 3).
that all aim to assess the “cultural values” at the MCAC through a combined physical and experiential analysis of the site (Smith et al., 3).

In Danielle Lamoureux’s contribution to the Willowbank study, *A Corporate History of McMichael*, she endeavours to address the historical development of MCAC as an institution devoted to the display and management of a collection of art. Lamoureux contends that “the concept of what the gallery is,” is largely the result of administrative changes throughout the institution’s history (9). Lamoureux divides the historical analysis into three distinct phases. The first stage represents the period of the McMichaels’ private ownership from 1954 to 1965, followed by an early institutional or “gallery” phase from 1965 to 1980. The final phase in the MCAC’s transition is framed as an “institutional” period from 1980 to the present (9 -11). These three phases in the collection’s development provide a useful structure for a historical analysis of the collection’s “corporate history” that reveals an institution “in transition” (9). Lamoureux attributes these “changes in administration” as a pattern of successive modifications to the administration’s perceived status as a collecting institution (9). Lamoureux notes that although the McMichaels’ collection was donated to the Province in 1965, it was only in 1974 that Tapawingo finally opened to the public every day of the week. In other words, it took almost a decade for the gallery to transition from a fully private space to one dedicated to the public. What’s more, as prescribed in 1965 agreement, the McMichaels maintained residence at Tapawingo throughout this period. It helps remind us that the transition of the MCAC to a fully public space was far from immediate and the private realm of the McMichaels overlapped with the public gallery spaces for many years after the 1965 donation. This temporal insight is often forgotten during the discussion of the MCAC’s institutional development. This extended period of transition has a potentially significant impact on the presence of the pioneer objects at the MCAC throughout the late 60s and into the 1970s, a connection that will be explored further in Chapters 5 and 6.

Ashleigh Bell’s contribution to the Willowbank report entitled ‘Evolution of Interiors: from Private Residence to Public Gallery’, is also important since it aims to look at the “evolution” of the interior at Tapawingo over the three time phases identified by Lamoureux (Bell, 14). Bell’s analysis of the transition of Tapawingo from residence to gallery and its subsequent growth emphasizes many important elements that contribute to the overall experience of the gallery. Of particular note, Bell describes the importance of the log cabin aesthetic developed by the
McMichaels during the construction of Tapawingo, and used throughout the galleries. Moreover, she identifies ‘mid-century furnishings’ in connection to the construction of galleries 8 and 9, but provides no further details about them (17). Bell’s study is important here because of what is not discussed: the presence of the PO throughout the gallery’s expansion and development. Such absence of the PO from the analysis, much like in Murray’s work (2006), informs this project’s interest in — and reinforces the need for — study of the PO at the MCAC.

Siobhán Smith’s *The Art of Exclusion: The Status of Aboriginal Art in the McMichael Canadian Art Collection* (2008) presents a helpful analysis of the MCAC’s interest and commitment to Aboriginal art. Arguing the collecting mandate at the MCAC has always been more inclusive than the Euro-Canadian/Group of Seven mandate articulated in Bill 112, passed at Queen’s Park in 2000, Smith developed three important timelines that help support her position (160). The “Chronology of Collection” timeline traces important historical moments in the development of the Collection from 1951 to 2004. The “Legislative Timeline” is exhaustive in its presentation of key dates related to provincial amendments and is supplemented by explanatory notes. This chronological listing and description of the legislative changes is a useful resource for research into the Collection’s development as a publicly administered collection. Finally, Smith’s extensive list “MCAC Mandates in Comparison” (Appendix A) presents various documents that have played significant roles in defining the nature of the Collection and its administration. This last table is especially insightful because it highlights sections in various institutional and legislative documents that helped shape and reshape the institution’s Indigenous collecting policies, while also highlighting institutional interest in collecting other material, such as “artifacts” (189).

Viewed in combination, Smith’s three appendices represent a triangulated approach supporting her position that “it was not the collection that changed over time, but rather Robert McMichael’s version of what had been the original intent of the collection” (2008, 160). Smith’s timelines show how changes in institutional policy and legislation have the power to reframe the scope and mandate of a collection. In the case of the MCAC, these changes also reflect the fluctuations in the way material in the collection have been incorporated into the legislative and institutional documents that express the nature of the collection.
2.6 Summary

This chapter provides a detailed introduction to Robert and Signe McMichael and their initial role as collectors and to the origins of the MCAC as an institution and a collection. Murray’s introduction to *100 Masterworks* reveals a contemporary emphasis on defining the development of the collection through the collection’s art holdings and the subsequent removal of any mention of pioneer objects as part of the collection’s past.

The theoretical framework for the project orients the reader to the project’s interest and relies on Clifford’s history of collections theory as the core research methodology. Pearce’s discussion surrounding the distinction between collections and collecting studies was introduced alongside a comparison of Duval (1973) and Belk (2008) in order to distinguish important differences separating collection and collecting studies and how that shapes the research.

Finally, a review of Sidey (2012) Lamoureux’s and Bell’s chapters from the unpublished Willowbank Report, and Smith (2008) presented additional research on various perspectives on the MCAC’s institutional development. Analysis of these works supports the observation that Murray neglected to mention pioneer objects as part of her introduction, and reinforces the idea that there is a larger lack of understanding surrounding PO at the MCAC.
Chapter 3
Event 1

The 1965 Agreement

In order to properly introduce the 1965 Agreement\(^\text{16}\) and the main arguments structuring Event 1, it is necessary to establish the historical context leading up to the agreement. In so doing, important elements of the McMichaels’ collecting practices and aesthetic choices at Tapawingo will be made clear which will help reveal how the 1965 Agreement altered the relationship between the PO and the broader McMichael collection. This shift is the earliest example of an identifiable ‘discrimination’ that changed the way the McMichaels’ collection was imagined established a new framework for the management of the pioneer objects after the institutionalization of the McMichaels’ home and collection.

3.1 Historical Context

Completed in 1954, the McMichaels’ house was constructed of repurposed barn timber, fieldstone and glass. Their home was a structure Pierre Berton described as a “modern version of a pioneer cabin” (Berton 1956, 12). Using the home’s fireplace and stonewall foundations as anchors for the cabin’s structural timber walls, the McMichaels integrated a large glass wall into the design to create a natural light source and exploit the view of the Humber valley (Berton 1956, 10-12). It was within these gallery spaces that the McMichaels began hanging their works of art and pioneer objects. As part of this interest, Tapawingo was expanded in 1962 to include a second living room that acted as additional gallery space\(^\text{17}\). By the time their second gallery was complete, the McMichaels had a substantial private collection of works by members of the Group of Seven and Tom Thomson, as well as a number of First Nations masks from the North-West Coast of British Columbia (Duval 1973, 6). In addition to their art they also incorporated old pioneer tools and domestic items into their displays. Reflecting on these displays, Robert

\(^{16}\) The 1965 Agreement is reprinted here as Appendix C. However, the source for this version of the Agreement was as an appendix in Dowsett’s 1972 report. When citing from the Agreement, pagination will reflect its presence in Dowsett.

\(^{17}\) Plate 4 depicts the McMichaels posed in the 1962 addition, The Varley Gallery, circa 1965.
McMichael wrote in his 1986 autobiography:

> Along the length of the highest timbers in our living room walls we mounted flat iron tools and implements from pioneer days, [...] Their shapes, many of which resembled abstract sculpture, provided a harmonious counterpoint to the hewn, textured surface of the old logs (27).

Interestingly, the display of artifacts and art together is also shared by the Barnes Foundation in Philadelphia. Curated by a 19th century American industrialist, the Barnes displays its holdings of impressionist paintings alongside jewelry, masks, and barn door hinges. As the McMichaels’ collection continued to grow throughout the 50s and early 60s, public interest in their collection and home began to grow. The McMichaels responded by providing tours sometime in the early 60s (Duval 1973, 7). It was also during this time that the McMichaels added a second “gallery wing” to their home (Dowsett 1972, 5). Shortly thereafter, the McMichaels began actively considering a donation of their home and collection to various levels of government in Canada. Their search for an appropriate guardian for their collection culminated in 1965 with an agreement between the McMichaels, the Province of Ontario, and a provincial Crown corporation call the Metro Toronto Regional Conservation Authority.

3.2.1 The McMichaels and Their Donation Interests

According to several accounts, the McMichaels always intended to institutionalize their home and art collection for the benefit of the public. For example, in One Man’s Obsession, Robert writes: “We had long since made the firm decision to give Tapawingo and the art collection to some level of government […] as a public art gallery” (1986, 144). Murray echoes Robert McMichael when she writes: “From the beginning, Robert and Signe had envisioned the development of their collecting activities and the expansion of their home into a vibrant public institution” (2006, 4). More specifically, the 1970 collection catalogue suggests that the McMichaels began “drawing up plans” to develop their home and collection into a public gallery sometime in the early 1960s (Duval 1970).
Robert McMichael suggests that they initially hoped to open their collection under the auspices of the National Gallery of Canada; however, the National Gallery declined, claiming their constitution did not permit the establishment of satellite facilities (1986, 145). Nevertheless, their home and collection garnered interest from the Metropolitan Toronto and Regional Conservation Authority (MTRCA). An arms-length corporation of the Ontario provincial government, the MTRCA was the product of the amalgamation of four smaller conservation authorities acting as municipal organizations tasked with the conservation and management of land surrounding important watersheds. Robert McMichael suggested that the MTRCA took an interest in their proposal because the organization operated a conservation area directly adjoining the McMichaels’ property (1986, 145). However, the negotiations stalled because the MTRCA mandate did not authorize the organization to operate an art gallery (145). Nevertheless, as mentioned earlier in Chapter 2, the McMichaels’ managed to negotiate an agreement with the MTRCA and the Province of Ontario to establish the McMichael Canadian Conservation of Art by 1965.

3.2.2 The 1965 Agreement

Broadly speaking, the 1965 Agreement document (Appendix B) outlines the general premise for the transfer of the collection and facility to the Province as well as initial institutional policy framing its collecting interests, operation structure and the continuing relationship between the McMichaels and the Government of Ontario (henceforth ‘Crown’). Although initial discussions surrounding the McMichaels’ interest in donating their site and collection to the MTRCA fell through, the MTRCA did play an important role in the Agreement and the early development of the McMichael Canadian Conservation of Art. Provision 4 in the Agreement confirmed the MTRCA as the party responsible for "the preservation and maintenance" of the McMichaels' site and facilities on behalf of the Crown (Dowssett 1972, 12). In addition, the Corporation was able to appoint a member of its Executive Committee to the MCAC’s advisory committee. Provision

19 See page 12.
7 in the Agreement established a five member committee responsible for the oversight and approval of all maintenance, development, and acquisitions to the site, facility, and Collection. The Agreement appointed Robert and Signe McMichael as lifetime members to the committee and included additional fixed-term positions for a member of the MTRCA Executive Committee, a representative of the Crown, and a committee Chair. From an institutional perspective, the structure of the advisory committee is important because of their broad powers and authority similar to a Board of Trustees.

Beyond their new roles as lifetime members of the advisory committee, Provision 13 established the McMichaels as direct advisors to the Crown regarding the development and maintenance of the collection for the new institution. Additionally, Provision 23 identified the McMichaels as curators and "supervisors of tours" of the collection (Dowsett 1972, 13.). In consideration of these various roles undertaken by the McMichaels, Provision 23 also permitted the McMichaels to remain at Tapawingo as permanent tenants. In addition to designating the McMichaels as collection advisors to the Crown, Provision 13 also established a list of artists that at the core of the institutional collecting mandate. The provision also gave the advisory committee the authority to include works by other artists considered to have “contribut[ed] to the development of Canadian art” (Dowsett 1972, 12).

3.3.3 The Agreement, from a Pioneer Object Perspective

Overall, the 1965 Agreement laid out a plan for how the Crown and the McMichaels would share the responsibilities of operating the collection and facility as a public gallery. Interestingly, the only direct mention of the PO in the Agreement comes from the description of the McMichaels’ collection on page one, which states: “[the] McMichaels are the owners of a collection of Canadian paintings, drawings, sculpture and artifacts reflecting their vital interest in the cultural heritage of Canada” (Dowsett 1972, 12). This statement suggests that the Agreement recognized that the McMichaels’ collecting practices were varied and representative of an integrated view of Canadian cultural heritage that went beyond art collecting. The term ‘cultural heritage of Canada’ appears again in Provision 13, however in this instance it is only employed to describe the character of the institution’s collection of art. What is significant about the second use of the phrase is that it is limited to a much narrower set of objects: Euro-Canadian art in the collection.
The PO are also absent from Provision 15 where the agreement lays out the nature of the donation. In it, the agreement stipulates the McMichaels will donate “works of art listed in Schedule ‘C’” (See Appendix B). Schedule “C” provides a list of 161 artworks identified by title, artist, date of production, and dimensions. Nowhere does the list mention or recognize the possibility that objects beyond Schedule “C” are part of the transfer from the McMichaels to the Crown.

The Agreement, which set out the provisions regulating the donation and collecting interests of the new institution, did not mention Pioneer Objects (identified as ‘artifacts’ in the Agreement). Furthermore, the wording in Provision 15 underlines a shift in the understanding of the McMichaels' collection. Most importantly, it reframes the idea of cultural heritage as limited to the art in the McMichaels collection. Notwithstanding the above exclusions of PO from the agreement, Provision 3 is significant because it outlines the Crown's responsibility for the preservation and maintenance of the buildings and site known as “Tapawingo,” thereby opening up the possibility that the artifacts would be included in the Agreement under these provisions (Dowsett 1972, 12). It says:

The Crown [Province of Ontario] agrees to preserve and maintain in perpetuity the lands and building of Tapawingo as a setting and gallery for the collection of art to be established by the Crown hereinafter provided.

(Dowsett 1972, 12)

The significance of the term “setting” as used in this passage can be clarified by comparing it with published descriptions of Tapawingo prior to the development of the Agreement. Accounts of the setting at Tapawingo in Pierre Berton (1956) and Ann Newton (1964) mentioned earlier clearly frame Tapawingo’s setting as ‘pioneer’ or ‘settler’. These accounts provide an opportunity to assess the underlying assumptions embedded in the Agreement’s use of ‘setting’ in Section 3.

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20 Italics added.
A close reading of Berton and Newton’s description of the factors at play in the creation of Tapawingo’s setting suggests that the juxtaposition of pioneer objects and building materials used to create Tapawingo were crucial in establishing its setting. Following Baudrillard’s discussion of inessential and essential qualities of objects as a lens for understanding associated cultural significance will make it possible to explore the apparent relationship between the PO and the built environment at Tapawingo. It is apparent that the PO were categorically separated from the McMichaels’ collection, and thus treated much like props in support of the setting established by the McMichaels and preserved under the terms of the Agreement.

3.3.3.1 Two Perspectives on the Pioneer Setting at Tapawingo

Using Baudrillard’s 1968 work *The System of Objects*, the study focuses on two key theories within the larger work: that space is a function of perceived relationships between objects, and how inessential and essential qualities in objects inform these relationships. Broadly speaking, Baudrillard is interested in analyzing “the processes whereby people relate to [objects],” and the various systems informing these connections (1996, 5). Baudrillard identifies an important shift in the West’s organizational structures which define relationships between people and objects. Before the 20th Century, the organizational model reflected Western moral conventions and strictly defined stable roles within domestic environments (15). Baudrillard argues that the 20th Century saw a transition from this “emphasis on unifunctionality” of rooms and the objects therein to an environment that prioritized a more relational approach to objects and the spaces created throughout domestic spaces (1996, 15; 18-19). In other words, freed from rigid moral conventions that had defined objects within Western homes, the ‘open’ model considers objects as elements within the larger design possibilities of a modern home (1996, 18).

Baudrillard suggests that by the 20th Century, objects began to act as part of a “combinatorial system”, reflecting careful arrangements of the various environmental and physical elements to deliberately convey a particular meaning(s) (25). As a result, objects and their arrangements in

21 It is important to note that Newton used the term settler rather than pioneer. For the purposes of this project they are considered synonymous.
the home no longer act to reaffirm the moral structures of the past, but rather the desires and intended meanings of the individuals responsible for their combination.

The idea that an open model liberates objects to form new relationships is important because, according to Baudrillard (1996), this possibility fundamentally restructures how objects construct space and embue it with a particular “atmosphere”. Much like words in a sentence, objects in the 20th Century became elements of a malleable code (25). From this point of view, the freedom to organize objects and other interior elements act to establish relationships that can be perceived as a personal system of organization and thus meaning, rather than a set of moral principles that that once structured the space and our understanding of it. What’s more, Baudrillard sees the liberation of objects as an opportunity to reconsider how they are deployed in the development of space (1996, 18). Space from this perspective can be understood as the perceived meanings of the relationships between the objects in a room. Furthermore, the nature of these objects and the carefully crafted relationships between them presents not only space, but a particular experience of the space that Baudrillard describes as atmosphere (20).

Baudrillard’s ideas on space and atmosphere are useful because they provide a conceptual framework in which to consider the deliberate creation of Tapawingo’s pioneer setting and how it influenced the way the Agreement addressed the PO. Throughout the analysis of Berton and Newton’s articles, Baudrillard’s theories frame an understanding of their accounts as an example of how the relationships between construction materials and PO not only create a domestic space, but codified it in such a way that suggests a pioneer atmosphere was clearly what the McMichaels intended.

3.3.3.2 Tapawingo’s Pioneer Setting: Historical Accounts and Analysis

Pierre Berton's (1956) article “The house that was made for Christmas” in Canadian Homes and Gardens is likely the first published account of Tapawingo and the McMichaels' early collecting. Although the article uses the Christmas holiday as a lens through which Berton introduces Tapawingo, what is interesting for our purpose is its careful descriptions of the textural quality of Tapawingo’s wood beams and displays of pioneer objects in the McMichael’s home. Although Berton is very conscious that Tapawingo is only a few years old, he argues the textured wood beams in the walls evoke a “spirit of the pioneer,” and the old kettles, candle holders, and crock
pots “bring a rich sense of the pioneer past” into the house (11).

Published eight years after Berton's article, Ann Newton’s article “Tapawingo” in Ontario Homes & Living also shares a similar interest in the experience of Tapawingo’s built environment. She writes: “Giant hemlock logs, dismantled from old Ontario homes and barns, preserve the pioneer image” (13). In both cases, a pioneer character is identified in the timber used at Tapawingo and correlated with a ‘pioneer’ aesthetic.

The relationship the articles assert between the timber and a pioneer spirit is clarified by Baudrillard's argument that wood provides atmospheric value to space through its capacity to embody cultural cues connected with time, for example, the impression that wood “ages;” he even goes so far to suggest that “[t]ime is embedded in its very fibers.” In other words, the qualities typically appreciated in the physical nature of wood, beyond its structural practicalities, often represents time, and its passing (Baudrillard 1996, 37). While Berton did not mention these sorts of marks in particular, he did highlight the structural timber was “weathered” from their earlier use as timber in barns and homes around the county (1956, 12). These comparable signs of age are like the “scars” Baudrillard considers crucial to wood’s atmospheric quality.

It is also important to note that these aging characteristics in the logs are surface qualities of the wood. The connection of these surface qualities to Baudrillard’s (1996) theories is best explained through his description of essential and inessential qualities. In short, inessential qualities represent elements of an object that reflect cultural signs of value that go beyond the object's functional qualities (10). The colour of a kettle and the branding of a handbag are both examples of inessential qualities of objects. Essential qualities on the other hand are qualities that are more abstract, and Baudrillard considers them virtually invisible in our daily experience of objects (6). Qualities like the electric capacity of the motor in a coffee grinder, or the design of the bean grinding mechanism are examples of essential qualities (10).

The significance of this distinction lies in the way these qualities shape how people relate to the objects. Using Berton (1956) as an example again, he describes the hemlock timber during his visit not through an expression of the wood’s structural capacity (i.e. essential quality), but rather through its superficial markings and their cultural connotations of time. The atmospheric
(pioneer) qualities of the wood are functions of what Baudrillard would define as the inessential qualities of the material. It is important to be aware that wood’s atmospheric value is a function of its inessential qualities because this is paralleled in the PO.

Berton’s description of “pioneer paraphernalia” at Tapawingo emphasizes a sense of historicity that permeates the home. He pays particular attention to a display of bonnet crimpers, ink bottles, and candle molds displayed in various open compartments of a room divider he sees as “set[ting] the theme of the house” (1956, 10) (See Plate 2). In other words, Berton's interest in these objects is their ability to enhance the home with a sense of a pioneer past. While he does not make explicit how he believes the objects convey a sense of the past, it is certainly the historical origins of the objects as quotidian settler tools and domestic items that frame their function as of a codified pioneer setting at Tapawingo.

Baudrillard's discussion of antiques provides an interesting theoretical lens for Berton's experience of a pioneer past at Tapawingo. Antiques hold a particularly meaningful place in the system of objects. For Baudrillard, an antique has no practical value (1996, 75). In other words, their technological (essential) qualities are outdated and obsolete within a functional system of objects. As a result, Baudrillard considers antiques as “purely decorative;” they act solely as signifiers of time (75). Their function as signifiers collapses temporal distance between their historical use and the contemporary moment establishing the antique as a symbol of time.

The pioneer objects identified by Berton are almost certainly technologically obsolete. The objects in the room divider are on display rather than stored away for future use and their arrangement within the room divider suggests their new function is to evoke a sense of time. Their function is solely aesthetic and their aesthetic (inessential) qualities are valued in relation to their historical appearance. Once valued for their use in domestic or farm chores, their role as display items shifts their value from the technological to the cultural sphere.

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22 Baudrillard describes the transition of objects as a process that typically progresses from the technological to the cultural. An object’s transition to the cultural sphere occurs when the aesthetic and non-functional elements of the objects begin to shape the object’s function (Baudrillard 1996, 6-9).
It is the shared ability to signify time through their inessential qualities that bring the PO into direct dialogue with the hemlock timber and vice versa. The McMichaels’ carefully considered interior design strategies enabled an ‘open’ combinatorial system, built to express a particular atmosphere and experience of their domestic spaces. This perceived relationship between the decorative and historical qualities of the timber and the pioneer objects arguably obscured the PO’s additional connections to the McMichaels art collecting activities. Newton's (1964) description of the McMichaels' home reinforces this possibility. Newton writes: “Tapawingo […] is an ideal setting for the tools, treasures and homely items of the past, and perhaps more significantly, for a large collection of paintings and sketches” (13). Newton's statement confirms that the 'tools' and ambiance of the home enhance the experience of the artworks, rather than acting as elements of the art displays. Newton's perspective not only reiterates Berton’s attitude towards the objects, but also reifies an art/artifact dichotomy that discounts the possibility that the artifacts were themselves to be considered alongside the art for their aesthetic beauty and appeal. The pioneer objects are instead understood as an assemblage of various items— part of the house's pioneer setting rather than as part of the broader McMichael collection.

3.3.4 Reconsidering the Agreement

With the insight garnered from the historical accounts of Tapawingo’s pioneer atmosphere, it is now possible to reconsider the 1965 Agreement and the implications surrounding the use of the term “setting” in Provision 3. Articles by Berton and Newton published before the Agreement demonstrate a shared perception of Tapawingo’s timber and pioneer objects as key elements in the creation of a pioneer experience. Following Baudrillard’s insights, it became clear that the timber and PO were carefully deployed based on their inessential qualities to act as signifiers of a particular era within a Euro-Canadian past. Berton’s and Newton’s respective impressions of Tapawingo help reaffirm the theory that Tapawingo was framed within a pioneer appeal which visitors experienced in large part through the combination of the weathered qualities of the wall timbers and the PO. The Agreement’s use of the term “setting” in Provision 3 shows that those who drafted the agreement assumed that the PO were elements of Tapawingo’s facility rather than objects in the collection. When the Agreement states the Province will maintain Tapawingo “as a setting,” it almost certainly understood this setting to include the PO (Dowsett 1972, 12).
In sum, the 1965 Agreement between the McMichaels, the MTRCA, and the Government of Ontario was a moment in the collection’s development when the PO were categorically separated from the art collection through the wording of Provision 3 and the assumptions that they were to be treated as part of the physical facility. From a collecting point of view, this reading of the document dramatically alters the way these objects relate to the broader McMichael collection. From a policy and collections management perspective, they are no longer part of the McMichael collection, but rather become aspects of the facility donated by the McMichaels in conjunction with the art donation. Event 1 demonstrates that from the very beginning of the MCAC, the PO were treated differently than the rest of the items collected by the McMichaels.
Chapter 4  
Event 2  

Pioneer Objects in the McMichael Collection Catalogues

This chapter focuses on the development of the collection catalogues at the MCAC during the early 1970s. During this period the McMichael experienced rapid growth in both collection acquisitions and gallery space. Between 1969 and 1973 two new exhibition rooms were built, providing an additional 29,000 feet of floor space (Duval 1973, 13). A likely catalyst for the physical expansion of the facility was the growth of the collection’s holdings. The 1965 Agreement lists 161 works, however the 1976 catalogue lists 927 works in the collection, meaning there was a six-fold increase in the collection's holdings in just over a decade.

The first catalogue, *The McMichael Canadian Conservation of Art* (1967), was published only a year after the official opening of the collection as a public institution. It established a publishing tradition at the MCAC that saw catalogues released approximately every three years up until 1983. The 1970 and 1973 collection catalogues mention PO as elements of the collection, although their presence in the catalogues is short-lived. By 1976 all mention of PO were removed. This chapter traces the PO through three MCAC catalogues, 1970, 1973 and 1976, to better understand how the PO were temporarily associated with the collection. Event 2 describes another moment at the MCAC where institutional interests led to the perception of the PO in ways that were discriminatory within the lens of Clifford’s history of collections theory.

To provide a useful comparative analysis, the presence of PO in the 1970, 1973, and 1976 catalogues will be compared to the presence of the First Nations and Inuit objects (henceforth Indigenous objects or IO) in the catalogues over the same period. This is significant because both categories of objects appear for the first time in the 1970 catalogue. More specifically, they are introduced together and discussed separately from the art collection. However, as this analysis will show, the presence of IO quickly expanded beyond their first brief mention in the 1970 catalogue. By 1976 select IO were published as image plates alongside the works of Tom Thomson and the Group of Seven, and the entire collection was included in the thumbnail index

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23 Section “C” of the 1965 Agreement lists 161 works as part of the McMichaels’ original donation.
called “catalogue of collection in total” at the back of the publications. The goal of this chapter is to examine the treatment of the PO and IO materials in three catalogues published in 1970, 1973 and 1976 and trace the way these two groups of objects were treated differently.

### 4.1 The Catalogues

For the purposes of this analysis, the multiple editions of the catalogue are considered as an evolving MCAC catalogue, each edition representing minor adjustments in the introduction, modifications to the presentation of art works in the Image Plate Section (IPS) and inclusion of new acquisitions in the collection catalogue listing. The publication of a catalogue also correlates with significant modifications or expansions to the Collection and its facilities. For example, the 1967 edition appears to commemorate the official opening as a public gallery in 1966. Later publications like the 1973 and 1976 editions also mark milestones for the Collection. In 1973, Provincial legislation was passed awarding the Collection Crown-corporation status (Sidey 2012, 8). This new status presented the Collection with greater independence from its parent organization, the Metropolitan Toronto and Region Conservation Authority, and coincided with a name change to the McMichael Canadian Collection (McMichael 1986, 389). 1976 saw major facility expansion and introduction of the Woodland Art category to the Collection and the catalogue (McMichael 1986, 314). These are factors that will be important when discussing external pressures that might have influenced the publications.

Looking at the overall catalogue design, it is possible to identify a three-part structure to their layout. The first section represents a textual introduction of the collection. It chronicles the McMichaels’ early collecting and the transformation of their collection into a public institution as well as discussions of significant artists in the catalogue. Immediately following the introduction, numerous pages display large, full-colour image plate reproductions from select artists. The middle sections always lack a title or heading that identifies the shift in the catalogue's content. As a result, this research will refer to the middle section simply as the

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24 The catalogues have also used other subtle forms of separating the introduction from the image plate reproductions. For example, a sketch of Tom Tomson’s cabin on the MCAC site by AJ Casson is used in the 1970
Image Plate Section or IPS. The last section of the publication is a comprehensive list of artists and artworks held by the Institution entitled “Catalogue of Collection in Total.” Here the complete art collection is reproduced in thumbnail size and organized vertically into columns. Each work’s basic information mirrors the column page layout but is separated from the images by a horizontal line dividing images from their textual descriptions.

It is important to consider how the IPS and the catalogue list shed light on the underlying classification practices surrounding the catalogue. For example, the 1973 IPS and catalogue list are both organized in roughly the same fashion: Euro-Canadian artists are represented first, with Inuit and First Nations artwork following as independent categories in that order. At the very least, it suggests that representation of the collection in the catalogue list is more than a simple disclosure of the institution's holdings. In relation to the analysis of the representation of PO in the 1970 and 1973 catalogues, it will be important to recognize how design elements inform the way collection items are contextualized and relate to the broader collection.

4.2 Emergence of PO and IO in the 1970 Catalogue

As mentioned earlier, the 1970 catalogue is important because it presents the first time the PO are acknowledged in relation to the collection. The PO briefly appear in a paragraph that extols their value as pedagogical specimens. David Duval writes: "For those interested in the legends and anthropology of Canada's original settlers, there are striking totems, masks and figures carved by our West Coast Indians and contemporary Eskimos, as well as pioneer artifacts" (1970). While only one sentence in length, the statement is significant for several reasons. First, these objects were introduced as a group, instead of as individual works associated to individual artists or makers. Take for example an excerpt describing some of the collection’s works recently donated by Robert S McLaughlin: “in 1968 [McLaughlin] offered his entire collection of Canadian paintings […] this includes masterpieces by Clarence Gagnon […] Lauren Harris’ Pic

25 So as not to confuse discussion of the entire collection catalogue and the catalogue list at the end of the publication, the term ‘catalogue’ will refer to the entire publication while ‘catalogue list’ will stand in for the longer Catalogue of Collection in Total section identified in the publications.
Island and Northern Lake, A.Y. Jackson’s Radium Mine and Arthur Lismer’s Bright Land’ (Duval, 1970). Here objects are individually introduced, attributed to a maker and even contextualized further through mention of a prior collector and the date of their donation to the MCAC. While not every object in a collection may have a detailed provenance as the works in the latter excerpt, in Duval’s introduction of the PO and IO their generalized description suggests they are of relatively lesser importance to the collection. In addition, Duval's emphasis on the anthropological nature of the items suggests an assumption that the PO and IO share more in common with each other than with the broader art collection.

Considerable effort is spent tracing the representation of Indigenous objects in the publications. They provide a comparative sample to help highlight the treatment of the PO. Indigenous objects are comparatively useful in this context because they were alongside the PO as ‘anthropological’ elements in the 1970 catalogue. However, by 1976 integration and representation of the two groups of objects indicates very different trajectories within the catalogues (see Table 2 in Appendix E). Comparing these groups provides an opportunity to assess the changes in institutional perspectives associated with the two groups, exposing the underlying ideological framework informing the bifurcation of the PO and IO as categories in the catalogues and the expansion of the Indigenous objects in the later catalogues.

4.3 Tables

In order to describe the shifts in the representation of the IO and PO in the catalogues, this chapter provides two tables which visually breakdown PO and IO presence in the catalogues. The structures of the tables are briefly introduced and explained as part of a three-stage approach to the analysis of the catalogues as follows:

1) Analyze the emergence of the pioneer and Indigenous objects in the 1970 catalogue;

2) Identify the changes in the collection’s presentation of the Indigenous objects in the 1973 catalogue; and

3) Consider the significance of the removal of the pioneer objects from the 1976 catalogue.
Analysis will demonstrate a shift in perspectives on the IO from anthropological specimens (that speak to various historical First Nations and Inuit cultural groups) to pieces of art are (that introduced as individual expressions of creativity). This shift in focus on the IO introduces new standards or representation for the items that bring their presence in the catalogues more inline with the publication’s approach to the Euro-Canadian artworks. Conversely, representation of PO does not change over the course of the 1970 and 1973 catalogues. Their description remains not only limited but also tied to an anthropological interpretation and presentation of the items. These catalogues reaffirm the changing perspectives on these two groups of objects that were initially classified under a shared categorical banner. In other words, tracking the changing presence of IO in the catalogues helps highlight how the catalogues integrate IO into the collection in various ways and how similar steps were not employed for the PO.

Table 2 (see Appendix E) maps the development of the collection catalogues using four mind-map visualizations. Each map corresponds to a catalogue from 1967 to 1976. Its purpose is to further the analysis and understanding of the overall changes in the representation of IO and PO in the publications. The khaki branches represent mention of PO and IO objects in the introductions; the blue branches identify the various categorical headings given to IO objects in the IPS; the red branch identifies when IO were included in the catalogue list; and lastly, the ochre branch represents the organization of Euro-Canadian artists in the IPS of each catalogue. Although describing the organization of Euro-Canadian artists in the catalogue is relatively of minor importance to the project, the understanding of their position within the catalogues is useful in understanding the integration of the IO into the IPS. It is also important to note the difference and significance of the dotted and solid lines in the charts. For example, the dotted line branching out from 1976 catalogue represents the absence of discussion that was present in the previous catalogue. Looking over Table 2, it is possible to compare the individual catalogues in order to assess the shifts in representation of PO and IO over the four catalogues. This comparative analysis is significant because it provides an effective way to quickly compare how each catalogue presents various aspects of the collection.

Table 3 attempts to interpret Event 2 on a macro scale. Its purpose is to present a generalized impression of the degree of all forms of PO and IO representation in the various catalogues. The Y-axis represents the relative degree of representation the objects are given within the various catalogues. The X-axis identifies the various collection catalogues and tracks them in a time-
based, left-to-right manner to help compare the presence of the pioneer and Indigenous objects within the catalogue. Another important part of the chart’s information is related to the colours used to differentiate the various forms of representation. The green data points represent the representation of the PO and IO as a shared category of objects. Corresponding primarily to Duval’s ‘anthropological’ introduction mentioned earlier. The green circles represent the visual combination of the two groups. The yellow data points indicate the evidence that Indigenous objects began to develop an independent trajectory and forms of representation. Overall, the chart’s purpose is to visually trace the various levels of catalogue representation\textsuperscript{26} of these two

\begin{table}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{chart.png}
\caption{Graphical representation of the PO and IO in MCAC collection catalogues between 1967 and 1976.}
\end{table}

\textsuperscript{26} Quantification of the evidence depicted in Table 3 is based on two factors: quantity of pages allotted to the objects in the catalogues and the frequency they are referenced or identified throughout the catalogues. By combining these two factors into single data points for each catalogue it is possible to visualize the relative significance of the PO and IO by comparing aggregated representations of their presence throughout the catalogues.
groups of objects over four editions of the catalogue. It visually depicts the synthesis of the evidence and depicts their relative degree of representation in the catalogues.

4.4 Emergence of IO and PO in the Catalogues

Table 2’s visualization of the 1970 catalogue identifies the combined introduction of pioneer and Indigenous objects through its khaki branch. Quoted earlier in the chapter, Duval’s mention on the objects in 1970 represents the first published recognition of these items in the catalogues. Although these items are mentioned in the introduction, they do not appear in either the IPS or the catalogue list. There is no explanation in the catalogues for this distinction; however, the letter written in 1969 by John Robarts and Robert and Signe McMichael to the Acquisition Committee meant to clarify the MCAC’s mandate to include acquisitions of Indigenous and pioneer objects (Robarts et al. 1969, quoted in Smith 2008, 164). In other words, the appearance of PO and IO in the catalogue’s introduction might stem in part from the desire of Robarts and the McMichaels to include such items in any discussion of the collection, nevertheless, the catalogue’s design maintains a clear separation of these items from the broader collection of paintings displayed in the Image Plate Section.

The mention of the PO and IO in the 1970 catalogue is registered as the first green circle in Table 3. The chart indicates the objects share equal prominence in the catalogue as anthropological elements of the MCAC’s collection. However, the relationship between IO and PO to the broader collection begins to change rather dramatically in the next catalogue. The description and assessment of these changes in both charts will demonstrate how Event 2 informs the broader study of the PO at the MCAC.

4.5 The Bifurcation of the IO and PO in the catalogues

The treatment of the PO and IO begins to change with the 1973 catalogue. Table 2 identifies three ways the catalogue treats the IO differently: how they are re-introduced in the introduction as art; their inclusion in the IPS; and their appearance in the catalogue list.

The bifurcation of the 1973 khaki branch in Table 2 represents the moment when First Nations and Inuit objects are first described as art in the introduction, and are effectively separated from the PO. Reframing the works as “art,” the introduction establishes a new lens through which the
objects are interpreted. In this example, Duval describes IO as part of the Gallery’s newly expanded spaces dedicated to Western Canada:

Indian and Eskimo Art now hold a significance place in the Collection […] works include totems in wood and argillite, masks, paddles and a number of dramatic contemporary Eskimo sculptures and prints. Here also hang the monumental works by Emily Carr and Lawren Harris, along with views of Skeena River area and the Rockies by such masters as A.Y. Jackson, J.E.H. MacDonald and F.H. Varley. (Duval 1973, 13)

The passage reflects a stronger connection between the IO and the Euro-Canadian art elements of the Collection by juxtaposing their introduction as art alongside mention of established works and artists in the collection. The new association of IO with the broader art collection is reflected in Table 2 by the blue extension of the ochre branch representing the inclusion of photographic reproductions of IO material within the IPS. Highlighting select Inuit and First Nations works in the IPS accords them the same treatment as works by Tom Thompson and other Euro-Canadian artists (Plates 6a and 6b). In doing so, the catalogue’s design indicates that these works now share a similar position of importance and should be visually treated within the catalogue in much the same way.
Plates 6 a and b  Although both examples share space in the IPS, there are distinct differences in the way the catalogue presents the work. In particular, the way the work’s creator and its medium are identified.

The red branch in the 1973 mapping (Appendix E) represents the inclusion of IO into the catalogue list. The Collection’s Indigenous items appear in concert with the broader Canadian art held by the MCAC. It is important to mention, however, that the catalogue list still separates IO from the work of Euro-Canadians. Nevertheless, in both IPS and catalogue list sections images of the items now include textual recognition of known artists, dates, and materials attributed to the pieces. The representation of the IO begins to mirror the historical approach to the rest of the art in the collection. The inclusion of IO in the IPS and catalogue’s list supports the argument that the catalogue’s creators were still partly thinking of them as anthropological specimens rather than as unique artistic creations created by individuals. The difference between the Euro-Canadian and IO in the IPS and catalogues was the absence of any titles in the description of the Indigenous art. It is impossible to determine if titles for the works exist, therefore it is difficult to say if they are absent because their creators never titled the items, or if the titles were simply omitted from the catalogues. Regardless of these peculiarities that distinguish the presentation of the Euro-Canadian and Indigenous items in the IPS, the catalogue’s transition from broad
cultural descriptions of the IO in the collection to photographic and textual representation of individual items demonstrates a shift in the status of Indigenous art in the MCAC catalogues.

The 1973 catalogue contains an exact copy of the paragraph used in the previous catalogue to introduce the pioneer and Indigenous objects, but this is where the catalogue’s treatment of these two categories of objects ends. Discussion of the IO begins to focus more on relationships with other art objects in the collection and even pushes into descriptions of provenance and stories surrounding their acquisition. Indigenous objects are also introduced individually through the IPS and catalogue list. In contrast, the PO remain a rather ambiguous group of objects described categorically in the introduction, and do not benefit from any discussion of their acquisition, nor is there any clarification of their relationship to the broader display of the collection at the MCAC. Table 3 illustrates the bifurcation of IO and PO in the 1973 catalogue by displaying a yellow data point above the green data point. The diagram highlights the broadening representation of IO while the discussion of PO remains unchanged from the 1970 catalogue.

Growing public interest in Indigenous pieces in the collection likely played a part in the catalogue’s new focus on IO. External factors such as other museum exhibits and collection acquisitions might have influenced the MCAC’s 1973 catalogue. For example, the National Gallery of Canada exhibited an Inuit art show called *A Decade of Eskimo Prints and Recent Sculpture from Cape Dorset* in 1967. In addition, the Winnipeg Art Gallery hosted an exhibit called *Treaty Numbers 23, 287, 1171* in 1972. The show brought serious attention to several significant Indigenous artists (Martin 2014, 216). These events may not have had a direct influence on the MCAC’s reframing of their IO as art, but they provide an historical context in which interest in Indigenous items in art collections were beginning to be redefined within the new artistic paradigms that structure those environments.

### 4.6 Removal of the PO from the 1976 Catalogue

Table 2’s mapping of the 1976 catalogue demonstrates a continuing interest in integrating IO into various elements of the catalogue and institutional history and introduces a new indigenous...
category of Woodland Art. The 1976 catalogue also introduces additional historical accounts of
the McMichael’s collecting practices surrounding Indigenous objects dating back to the late
1950s. Similar to the 1973 discussion of the McMichaels’ acquisition of a Totem pole, the 1976
catalogue states: “[McMichaels] first West Coast Indian piece was […] purchased in British
Columbia in 1957” (Duval 1976, 6). From an historical perspective, the attribution of a location
and date of acquisition is significant because it demonstrates that the McMichaels collecting had
always included IO, contrary to the idea that the historical integrity or scope of the collection is
altered or contested by the presence of IO in the catalogues as suggested by Robert McMichael
in his 1986 autobiography. In short, the prominence of Indigenous art in the collection
continued to grow in the catalogue while mention of the PO was removed. 1976 represents a
moment when the MCAC catalogues ceased incorporating non-art objects in the discussion of
the Collection and consolidated its focus on the collection as uniquely art historical in nature.

4.7 Significance of Findings

Looking at the overall trend of the collection catalogues, there is a noticeable shift in the IO’s
relationship with the PO and the broader art collection. Viewed chronologically, this shift
represents a transition of the underlying treatment of the IO in the catalogues from an
anthropological to art historical framework. This transition is apparent in the shift from their
Furthermore, their visual presence in the publication by 1973 supports the idea that their
importance in the catalogue relates more to their aesthetic values than to their ethnographic
qualities. Furthermore, increased description of the collecting activities surrounding various IO
indicates an interest in establishing provenance for the items and a repositioning of the items
within an art historical context.

In contrast, the PO were not discussed at great length. Their introduction is broadly categorical
with no discussion of individual items, and furthermore, the catalogues never included collecting
histories, photographic depiction, or basic information on the individual objects. This is

28 For Inuit Art see page 89; for North West Coast art see pages 91 to 94.
interesting because Robert McMichael clearly states in his 1986 autobiography that PO were collected during their search for appropriate timber in the nearby barns (McMichael 1986, 27). In addition, records from the MCAC registration department indicate donations of artifacts to the collection, which provide some degree of provenance information for select pioneer objects29. Many of the PO were in fact collected by the McMichaels themselves, which means their provenance could at least be traced back to a farm and/or family. Therefore, it is not that the PO completely lacked collecting histories, but rather that they were omitted from the published catalogues.

From Clifford’s history of collection’s point of view, the catalogues reveal a bias towards an art historical approach that prioritizes items with collecting histories and information that supports an interpretation of the work as art (e.g., artist name, title, materials, date of creation, acquisition histories). These categorical requirements effectively discriminate against objects that lack such types of information. While this catalogue paradigm might not have been consciously created to target the PO, it was this segment of the collection that was most affected. Clifford describes this disparity when he observed Western collecting:

> confronts any collected exotic object with a stark alternative between a second home in an ethnographic or an aesthetic milieu. […] In the former a work of ‘sculpture’ is displayed along with other objects of similar function or in proximity to objects from the same cultural group, including utilitarian artefacts […] the names of individual sculptors are unknown or suppressed. In art museums a sculpture is identified as the creation of an individual […] in the art museum it is primarily ‘beautiful’ or ‘original’. (Clifford 1994, 264-265)

Following Clifford’s observations and looking at the treatment of PO and IO in the catalogues, it is clear that by 1976 the publication was treating the IO largely as original works of art. Conversely, the PO were removed from the catalogues altogether. Confronted with a catalogue that privileged the individualistic creative endeavours of artists and objects of significant beauty and originality, PO like the scythe and draw knife, while still present on the walls at Tapawingo,

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29 While not extensive, the Registration folder ‘Artifacts General File’ does include McMichael correspondence with donors of artifacts to the collection.
were removed from the published discussion of the institution that By emphasizing the art collection and an art historical approach, the catalogues published in the first half of the 1970s present a moment where changes to the interpretation of the MCAC’s collection created a situation where PO were no longer suitable for mention in the catalogues and were subsequently removed.

In the coming chapter, Event 3 introduces evidence that while PO were being removed from the catalogue, they were nevertheless recorded as part of a 1975 donation to the permanent collection. A situation that does not necessarily contradict their removal from the catalogues, however, it does suggest their presence at the MCAC continued to draw attention.
Chapter 5
Event 3

Pioneer Object Donation, December 17, 1975

This chapter will investigate the peculiar donation of art and various personal and pioneer objects by the McMichaels in 1975. The donation is significant because it demonstrates how the acquisition and registration processes at the MCAC treated PO and art objects differently. At the core of the event are the December 17th, 1975 Board of Trustee minutes, where Resolution #38 makes note of a donation by the McMichaels that included not only Inuit sculpture and North West Coast First Nations’ carvings, but also PO and even furniture from their home. For example, Schedule “A” from the December 17, 1975 Minutes includes titles for additional donation lists under the headings “Miscellaneous” and “Furnishings" (See Appendix C). Items on the Miscellaneous list include “wrought iron artifacts” and “pewter candle sticks” and other objects of a pioneer nature; however, there are other personal objects donated by Robert and Signe that appear on the Furnishings list. The donation is important because both “Miscellaneous” and “Furnishings” lists recording the donation appear to itemize some of the objects already highlighted in archival images including Plates 5 and 7 (see page 73).

Furthermore, the documentation surrounding the PO’s donation differs from the approach to the acquisition of art into the collection.

In what follows, analysis of the archival records demonstrates that the McMichaels’ donation of PO was almost certainly the result of various institutional activities that acted to delineate MCAC and McMichael property at Tapawingo. By juxtaposing the donation and registration records associated with the art donated alongside the PO, and by discussing the collection numbering system in use at the MCAC, it is possible to make a strong claim that the PO donation

30 The records also show these lists were also labeled with shorter inscriptions. For the sake of brevity, the Furnishings list will also be referred to as “A&M 4” and the Miscellaneous list will be referred to as “A&M 5”.

31 Due to the lack of clear registration procedures surrounding pioneer objects, it is virtually impossible to conclusively attribute photographic or documentary evidence to specific PO on A&M 4. As a result, the PO described in the records and depicted in historical photographs are treated as if they entered the Collection in a similar way. Making the need to identify and account for the treatment of specific objects of relatively little importance and allowing the project to focus on the broader treatment of the objects at the MCAC.
was intended to clarify ownership ambiguities that existed in the gallery spaces at Tapawingo, a result of the situation wherein Tapawingo performed double duty as the McMichaels’ residence and collection’s gallery space.

In order to carefully unpack the particulars of the 1975 PO donation, it will be important to consider some broader institutional activities and policies. This chapter will briefly contextualize the legislated changes to the Institution’s status that saw it transition from a publicly owned collection of art to a Crown corporation. The December 7 donation will be introduced and discussed in detail, particularly the formatting and registration discrepancies that differentiate the art and PO elements in the records. The findings and recommendations in the 1975 audit report introduce key evidence regarding the McMichael’s motivation to donate PO to the MCAC’s permanent collection. Particular attention is focused on the audit’s “fixed asset” concerns at the MCAC and its recommendation to create a register to confirm ownership of the items. Reframing the discussion of ownership is the concept of constructive possession which is used to develop a hypothesis that explore the McMichael’s desire to donate PO items while accounting for the MCAC’s atypical approach to the documentation of acquisitions to the permanent collection.

5.1 Organizational Structure at the MCAC circa. 1975

In order to understand the acquisition procedures at the MCAC, a brief description of the administrative structures at the MCAC during the 1970s is necessary. In 1972, the Ontario government passed legislation that significantly restructured the way the Collection operated. The legislation established the Collection as a Crown corporation under the new name McMichael Canadian Collection (Sidey 2012, 9). The legislation also provided legal mechanisms that enabled the Collection to function more independently, for example the MCAC’s new status allowed it to open a bank account and engage in day-to-day financial transactions without seeking prior approval from the MTRCA (McMichael 1986, 389). The Collection’s administrative structure also changed. The Advisory Committee established by the 1965 Agreement to oversee gallery operations remained largely in tact, but the committee (now called the Art Advisory Committee) focused solely on acquisitions and now required Board approval for any new acquisitions. Many of the same individuals that formally sat on the earlier
Advisory Committee agreed to sit on the Board alongside new appointees. The appointment of Trustees was very closely controlled by Robert McMichael, who wrote later that he largely handpicked the first set of board members (McMichael 1986, 391).

The position of Director at the McMichael Canadian Collection was also created in 1972 and was assigned to Robert McMichael (Sidey 2012, 10. This meant that by 1972 Robert McMichael’s role at the gallery was felt in at least three levels of management. He not only oversaw daily operations as Director, but he and Signe also sat on the Board and the Art Advisory Committee. It is clear that the McMichaels’ influence on the institution and collection remained strong after the legislated restructuring.

Beyond the legal and administrative changes put forward by the prior Advisory Committee (Dowsett 1972, 11), there appears to be one more reason the Province decided to incorporate the Collection. In her analysis of the Act, Sidey suggests “[t]he purpose of the Act was to transfer all artistic and non-artistic property of the Gallery to the newly-established corporation” (2012, 9). This is significant because it indicates that the incorporation of the Collection was also intended to clearly distinguish Robert and Signe’s personal property from objects owned by the Institution, a point of reference that becomes more important as Event 3 unfolded.

5.2 McMichael Donation, December 17, 1975

As mentioned earlier, the Board of Trustee minutes for the December 17, 1975 meeting introduced the McMichael donation as Resolution #38. This resolution introduced Schedule “A” and formally acknowledged the institution’s receipt of the items listed therein. It also recorded the Board Members’ unanimous vote to accept the items into the Collection. To better illustrate the significance of this donation it is important to separate Schedule “A” into its three main sections: Section “A”, A&M 4, and A&M 5. Broadly speaking, Schedule “A” is divided by donor. North West Coast items are itemized as Signe McMichael’s contribution with Robert

32 The archival copy of Schedule A consulted was part of the records for the December 6, Valuation Committee meeting. The role of the Valuation Committee is defined by Board Minutes from November 7th, 1973 where by-law No. 6 tasks the Valuation Committee with the role of providing fair market value assessments for objects and art works for the Board of Trustees.
McMichael’s donation listed below. Robert McMichael’s donations are further divided into two sections, the first representing Inuit sculpture, and below that a two item meta-list identifies the additional “Miscellaneous” and “Furnishings” lists (henceforth identified as A&M 5 and A&M 4 respectively).

A&M 5 itemizes ten listings, several of which are multiple objects grouped together. Each listing consists of a quantity, and a descriptive title of the object(s). The objects listed vary from pewter candlesticks and wrought iron artifacts to Claude Taft carvings and a pair of binoculars.

A&M 4 represents a detailed listing of McMichael furniture. The document is unique in that it organizes items by room, structuring itself around the physical location of the items within the facility at the time. Focusing in on individual listings, it is important to note that none of the objects include registration numbers, however, each listing contains a descriptive name, quantity, valuation, as well as occasionally providing dimensions and approximate production date. Lastly, it is also important to highlight how the document lists items in rooms that begin to extend beyond Tapawingo’s gallery spaces and into the McMichaels’ private quarters. For example, the second page of A&M 4 lists items from “Bedroom #1”, and “Bedroom #2,” suggesting that the donation incorporated items that had no direct relationship to the public operations of the MCAC.

5.3 Registration at the MCAC

Registration is understood to be the recording and processing of an acquisition (Carnell and Buck 2010, 44 [location 1423 kindle Mac]. For example, Resolution #38 in the 1975 Board Minutes acts as a witness to the transfer of the items from the McMichaels to the MCAC. In a similar way, Schedule “A” captures item information and establishes a preliminary itemized record for the transition. What is different about the donation accepted by Resolution #38 is what is absent in the recording of the donation. Typically, the registration process involves the creation and deployment of a unique identifying number for each item, a point echoed on page three of the 1980 report, *The McMichael Canadian Collection Status Report on Registration*: “[a registration number is] unique to an object […] and records the transaction whereby an object enters the collection”. Extending this understanding of the register’s importance to the development of a collection, Swinney (2012) underscores the importance of the registration process as a threshold
that distinguishes collections material from all else: “[r]egisters do not simply record collections, they construct them” (43). Carnell and Buck (2010) claim that the registration number goes beyond fundamental track-ability. For them, the significance of the registration number lies in its ability to act as a means to connect an object with various historical, institutional and other relevant documentation (44 [location 1423, Kindle on Mac]). In other words, a registration number has the ability to transform almost any seemingly mundane object into something that carries much broader significance through the number’s ability to connect the object to relevant documentation.

Looking at the items listed under Robert McMichael’s Inuit sculpture donations on Schedule “A” it is possible to identify (from left to right) registration numbers, the artists’ names, titles, brief descriptions of the stones used, dimensions, and a dollar values for each item. Schedule “A”’s approach to donation itemization is very similar to other lists itemizing earlier art donations recorded in Board of Trustee Minutes from around that time. The similarities between the records suggest the Inuit object listings mirror the broader institutional approach to donation registration and assigns a unique registration number to each art object. The numbering system in use is described in the registration file, ‘Note to file, March 2003’, created by current MCAC Registrar Janine Butler, and indicates the MCAC’s initial numbering system identified three-dimensional works of art with an “S-” prefix (ex: S-3, S-45, S-102) connected to a sequential numerical value to distinguish them. A similar alphabetical prefix is used to distinguish other media, while paintings are the exception to the rule. They do not have an alphabetical prefix, only sequential numbers (eg., 1, 34, 756).

A&M 4 and 5 present two examples where the records begin to diverge from conventional registration practices. For example, A&M 4 adopts a location-based approach grouping various itemized objects based on where they were found throughout Tapawingo at the time of donation. In theory, the documentation might make it possible to distinguish similar items from one another if the items are fixed to the floor and never changed rooms. However, if they moved

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33 For a similar itemization of art donations see “Schedule E” attached to the Minutes from the 3rd Board meeting in 1975. Accessible from the McMichael Canadian Art Collection Archive.

34 Registration folder: Old Registration Numbers. McMichael Canadian Art Collection
about, this approach to registration does little to help MCAC staff identify objects accurately. A&M 5 is even more problematic: there are no registration numbers, dimensions, production dates, or even mention of which room these items are located. Making matters worse, several listings are in fact groups of items. Such is the case for the “wrought iron artifacts,” a line that constitutes fifty items that perfectly represent the type of under-reported object this research is tracking. Overall, A&M 4 only makes it possible to quantify the number of items listed and and their estimated values. From Carnell and Buck’s point of view, A&M 4 is virtually useless as it fails to establish a unique identifier that links each object to relevant documentation.

Lack of registration numbers for some objects in the 1975 donation is not a simple anomaly. Files found in the MCAC’s registration folder ‘Old Registration System/ New Registration System’ show several earlier artifact donations that did not receive registration numbers. One early example relates to an acquisition on page two from the December 8, 1970 MCAC Board Minutes, and details a donation of American, English, and Canadian glassware without identifying numbers. What is significant about this evidence is that the lack of registration numbers cannot be attributed simply to the fact that the donated items belonged to the McMichaels, rather the practice of not registering artifacts at the MCAC during their acquisition is not unique to this particular donation.

What is unique about the 1975 donation is that a Provincial audit of the institution conducted in early 1975 raised concerns over assumptions about the use of McMichael property throughout the galleries. Turning our focus to the audit and additional relevant internal documents suggests that the 1975 PO donation was part of Robert McMichael’s strategy to rectify some of the auditor’s concerns.

35 One caveat for this particular record is that it also presents art donations without registration numbers. Subsequent Board Minutes, however, demonstrate that art objects listings in the Minute documentation began receiving registration numbers soon after.

36 Evidence in the CII suggests the glassware is material from early donors to the Collection. More importantly, the donor’s title on the index cards attributes the donation to a woman. Interestingly, she and her husband are recognized in the 1973 catalogue for their contributions to the collection. It seems likely that the glassware represents a segment of a rather large donation, and could very well represent items accepted by the MCAC in order to secure and add prized artworks to the Collection. The names of the donors are being withheld at the request of the McMichael.
5.4 Audit of the McMichael Canadian Collection, March 11, 1975

Three years after the incorporation of the Collection, the Province decided to audit the MCAC. The goal of the audit was to “examine the accounting procedures, accounting records and the internal control of finances”\textsuperscript{37}. More importantly, the auditor’s findings identified a “fixed asset” situation at the MCAC whereby “no records [were] maintained on furniture and equipment.” The report continues by saying “some furniture in the gallery such as cabinets and benches [were] the personal property of Mr. and Mrs. McMichael” (6). The audit recommended the MCAC develop a fixed asset register to help mitigate confusion regarding ownership, and, ultimately, control of objects in the facility (6). More specifically, the audit advocated the MCAC performed an inventory in order to definitively identify McMichael property in the Collection (6).

The audit’s comments demonstrate that Tapawingo’s domestic legacy was still felt in various ways ten years after the Province of Ontario acquired the building. This lingering domestic afterimage is not entirely a surprise; as per the 1965 Agreement, the McMichaels continued to live at Tapawingo. Section 23 of the 1965 Agreement clearly states “Robert McMichael and Signe McMichael shall each be entitled to reside at and occupy Tapawingo for the rest of their lives” (Dowsett 1972, 13). Robert McMichael (1986) reflected on this arrangement and suggested this provision within the 1965 Agreement represented “a good investment in the future” for the Provincial government, whereby the McMichaels’ would care for and develop the Collection for the remainder of their lives while allowing public access to the Tapawingo “on special occasions” (173). It is clear that Robert McMichael’s 1986 interpretation of the 1965 Agreement’s residency clause indicates a situation where their presence at Tapawingo was not only accepted, but that Tapawingo would likely continue to act more as their residence than as a public gallery.

Robert McMichael (1986) suggested that the development of additional wings for the display of the Provincial collection at Tapawingo would “put our bedroom and kitchen well out of the public’s way on the third floor” (172). Interestingly, the Agreement actually says little about how the McMichaels’ would actually live at the facility. It appears Tapawingo arguably never ceased

to be thought of as a home; rather it became a shared facility that would at times function as public gallery space, but only when needed.

What the McMichaels likely did not plan for was how quickly Tapawingo’s function as a public gallery came to dominate its use. Within a few years, the facility would transition almost entirely to a public gallery space (Dowsett 1972, 9). Complicating matters, during the late 60s and early 70s, the institution expanded in a way that was designed to mimic Tapawingo’s domestic origins: “two additional gallery wings built by the Province have been designed, constructed, and furnished along the same principals employed for the original building” (Dowsett 1972, 6). Overall, the Auditor’s concern regarding the mix of institutional and personal McMichael property within the galleries reflected a moment at the MCAC when McMichael furniture was used informally to establish a sense of domestic authenticity initiated when Tapawingo was a private home. By 1975 however, this informal arrangement between the McMichaels and the MCAC appears to have caused the auditor to take note and recommend the situation be more carefully delineated.

5.5 1975 Donation Triggered by Audit’s Fixed Asset Concerns?

Jumping ahead to 1983 briefly, a memorandum from Robert McMichael to Michael Bell sheds some light on the 1975 donation and its connection to the audit performed earlier in the year. McMichael’s memo requested the loan of a cabinet previously donated to the Collection for their exclusive use in their new house in Belfontaine. McMichael’s desire for the reestablishment of their exclusive use of the cabinet suggests that at the time of the cabinet’s donation the McMichaels must have expected to live at Tapawingo for the remainder of their lives, as outlined in the 1965 Agreement. Therefore, the cabinet donation, and more importantly, objects listed on A&M 4 and 5, were donated in “pursuant to the suggestion of the provincial auditor in 1975,” likely under the impression that the donation would never entail any physical separation and

38 During major renovations to Tapawingo in the early 1980s the McMichaels were initially moved to an apartment and later rehoused permanently in the nearby town of Belfontaine. For more information on the circumstances precipitating this move, see Event 4.
disruption in their access to these items. It is from this later memo that the implications of the 1975 donation begin to take on more importance. Rather than simply creating a fixed asset register, it appears that the McMichaels decided to present many of their private belongings to the collection, imagining that the objects would continue to embue the galleries with a pioneer setting and that their access to the objects would not be obstructed. The donation process was an attempt to satisfy the auditors call to clarify the institution’s relationship with these items. Instead of registering these items as McMichael property on a separate register, PO and McMichael furnishings were included in the permanent collection by default.

Robert McMichael’s later comments indicate that the 1975 donation was part of an attempt to rectify the concerns over ownership of objects on display at Tapawingo. It does not explain why the PO acquisitions proceeded without the implementation of unique registration numbers like the ones given to the Inuit art listed in Schedule “A.”

For insight into this element of Event 3, it is important to consider another Robert McMichael memo written in response to an inventory report from 1980. McMichael responded to Brian Stratton’s report, *The MCC Status Report on Registration 1980*, that identified large numbers of the three-dimensional objects found in the collections that had not been properly registered and identified in the records. In his defense, McMichael countered in a report entitled ‘Stratton Report’ by saying:

> Several objects in this area are very inexpensive, easily replaceable and used simply as display backdrops. They are in fact, worth less than the cost of making black and white photographs of them, and should probably been classified as display materials rather than Collection objects. (3)

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40 For more details on the inventory and the events that precipitated it, see Event 4

41 Found in Registration folder ‘Registration Reports from B. Stratton. McMichael Canadian Art Collection

42 Ibid.
In this example, Robert McMichael argues that the approach to the acquisition of certain objects should have proceeded differently due to the nature of the items, and that their inclusion in the permanent collection was not the appropriate course of action. The remark simultaneously justifies the absence of collection numbers by suggesting that only certain objects acquired for the collection are valuable enough candidates, while recognizing that such an internal distinction is rather uncharacteristic of a permanent collection.

5.6 Synthesis

Robert McMichael provides two seemingly conflicting positions that frame the 1975 donation. On the one hand, he argues the inclusion of the objects in the collection was intended to resolve some of the concerns raised by the 1975 audit. On the other, the nature of these items was of such relatively little importance in relation to the broader permanent collection that there was no apparent need to apply standard registration practices to structure a formal acquisition into the MCAC collection.

Reframing the 1975 donation outlined in Schedule “A,” A&M 4, and 5 through the audit report from earlier in the year, it is possible to see how the McMichaels’ continued presence at Tapawingo not only affected the institution’s ability to properly account for all items in the gallery spaces, but also informed aspects of the institutional approach to eliminating the “fixed asset” situation at the MCAC. It appears that the donation was undertaken purely for the sake of satisfying the auditor. Or more precisely, it was meant to appease an external perspective while maintaining the current institutional status quo within the galleries. From the point of view of an external audit, it allowed the MCAC to continue to use McMichael property within the galleries.

Furthermore, it appears that the McMichaels’ proceeded with the donation under the assumption that it would not interfere with their personal use of at least some of the donated items. The New Museum Registration Methods identifies similar situations as “constructive possession.” The glossary identifies such forms of possession as “not actual but assumed to exist, where one claims to hold by virtue of some title, without having actual custody” (Buck and Gilmore 1998, 366). This is an interesting concept within the context of Event 3 for a few reasons. Most significantly, it explains Robert McMichael’s need to ask for the loan of their old cabinet back to them for use in their new home in Belfontaine. There is no doubt the McMichaels’ understood
the legal ramifications of donating their furniture and PO to the institution. The moment the cabinet was accepted by the MCAC, it no longer legally belonged to the McMichaels, effectively ending any claim to their exclusive use of the item. Nevertheless, McMichael’s memo suggests they were giving up legal ownership of the item under the assumption that their proximity and exclusive use of the items would not be altered. In other words, the McMichaels never saw the donation process as a complete forfeiture of their access to the items, establishing a situation aptly described as constructive possession. Although this example does not directly involve PO, it serves as a striking example of how the McMichaels likely perceived the donation of many of the non-art items included in the 1975 donation in focus.

Constructive possession can also help explain Robert McMichael’s comments about the PO and their lack of any collection number. In this case, however, it is best used to highlight how McMichael argues the PO were in fact never appropriate for inclusion in the permanent collection. Swinney argues that “[r]egisters do not merely record collections, they construct them: documentary practices are part of a technology through which collections are made and delineated” (2012, 37). From this point of view, it’s possible to argue that PO never officially became part of the permanent collection. Nevertheless, documentation proves the objects were formally accepted and received Board approval, even though the absence of a collection number inhibits their inclusion in any collection register. According to Swinney’s argument, their lack of a collection number denies them formal entry into the collection because there is no standardized collection identifier to include in the MCAC’s register. Using this lens, the position that the PO were improperly registered places the donation of the PO not so much as a collecting act, but rather an act to placate provincial auditors. In other words, the process of documenting the transfer of the PO from the McMichaels to the MCAC had more to do with presenting objects in the gallery as MCAC property than actually supporting the MCAC’s collecting practices meant to enrich the Institution’s holdings. In this light, the objects do not become collection objects, but rather the symbolic transfer of ownership takes on greater significance. The 1975 donation was meant to show future auditors that these items no longer belonged to the McMichaels; however, since they did not receive collection numbers like most objects donated to the Collection, and since the McMichaels’ 1983 memo suggests they never expected to be separated from these objects, it is possible that the McMichaels never relinquished a sense of constructive possession of these items. This situation came to a head when the MCAC undertook major physical
renovations, and subsequent inventories of the collection raised questions about the actual status of the PO at the MCAC.
Chapter 6
Event 4

Creation of the Capital Items Index

Event 4 is an analysis of the Capital Items Index (CII) at the MCAC and the factors surrounding its creation. The focus of Event 4 is to understand the development of the card catalogue during a period of widespread administrative and facility overhaul between 1980 and 1983. To do so, this chapter brings into historical focus the appointment of new staff and Board members as well as capital renewal, registration, and inventory projects to provide a framework for discussing the CII and its influence on PO collecting and management practices at the MCAC. The analysis demonstrates that the creation of the CII, in conjunction with the removal of the objects from the gallery walls during major renovations, explains the absence of PO in the galleries today and helps to explain the silence surrounding PO at the MCAC which continues today.

At this point, it will be useful to quickly recap the historical events outlined by this research prior to the 1980 facility and administrative overhaul. During the early 1950s, the McMichaels began their search for barn timber to construct Tapawingo. While accumulating these logs, they also started to collect derelict farm tools found in the barns as well as at local auctions. Once the McMichaels took up residence in Tapawingo in 1954/55, they hung these tools along the top wall beams. From 1965 onwards, these objects continued to hang throughout the home as it began its transition from private dwelling to provincial institution. During the 1970s, these objects briefly appeared in two collection catalogue introductions, however by 1976 any mention of the objects in the introduction was removed. Meanwhile, Board of Trustee Minutes indicate the McMichaels presented many PO items as part of a donation in late 1975 to the MCAC, a move that was arguably intended to calm provincial auditor concerns over ownership of various items in the MCAC galleries.

6.1 Catalysts of Change at the MCAC

During late 1970s, Robert McMichael hired additional executive support. According to McMichael, John Court was hired as Administrative Director to oversee the considerable amount of paper work that was being generated by the Gallery (1986, 394). In light of this new appointment, Robert McMichael and Signe decided to take a vacation. Upon their return,
however, Robert says he discovered several detailed reports from consultants arguing that the buildings and site provided "inadequate safety features" and left the Collection particularly vulnerable to fire (395). Beyond the facility’s short comings, a 1980 management study found McMichael held “too much responsibility” and cites “numerous inadequacies” in connection to his performance as Director (Gildiner 1983, T3). The findings in these reports ultimately lead Robert McMichael to resign as director in the fall of 1980 (McMichael 1986, 396).

1980 was also a pivotal moment for the broader MCAC institution as it underwent major physical renovations that required it to close its doors to the public from 1980 to the summer of 1983 (Gildiner 1983). What is interesting about the situation that developed at the MCAC around this time is the combination of staff changes at the senior level in conjunction with major facility renovations. More specifically, it appears that the arrival of Michael Bell as Director and Brian Stratton as Registrar during this period of dramatic physical renovation resulted in various inventory projects that permanently restructured the nature of the MCAC’s inventory controls and collection protocol. A few critical projects appear to shape the creation of the Capital Items Index, and there is also evidence that the display of PO in the galleries began to change as well. What follows is a look at some of the projects at the MCAC from this time that demonstrate significant shifts in the institution’s approach to PO.

6.2 Capital Renewal and a Shift in the Presence of PO at the MCAC.

The Willowbank study previously mentioned in chapter two indicates that the management study of 1980 prompted the new Board of Trustees to order the architectural firm of Klein and Sears to perform a “safety and accessibility report” (Bell, 16). Subsequent renovations required the MCAC to close to the public until 1983 in order to complete the facility modernizations identified in the reports (Gildiner 1983). From a PO point of view, this period of renovation at Tapawingo is a critical moment because it appears to have been the occasion when the PO were removed from the gallery walls, indeed there is no evidence in the MCAC archive to suggest the PO were displayed on gallery walls after the modernizations were completed.
The last published photo of PO within the galleries found at the MCAC’s archive is part of the photo collage on the cover of the 1979-80 Annual Report (See Plate 7). The presence of PO throughout the MCAC facility did not completely cease after the renovations; however, photographic evidence suggests that their place in the MCAC fundamentally changed by 1983: is an image of PO in the archives from circa 1986-1989 that shows PO items hung on ceiling trusses in the MCAC’s restaurant. In short, PO presence throughout the MCAC facility did not completely cease after the renovations, however, photographic evidence suggests it’s at the MCAC fundamentally changed by 1983. After the MCAC reopened a pioneer objects were still

Plate 7  Detail from the cover of the 1979-80 Annual Report. The image in the top right corner clearly shows PO hanging on the wall. The image may have been taken sooner than 1979-80, but if the cover is representative of the MCAC at the time, it’s likely that a PO display depicted was considered current.

43 Image received via email correspondence with MCAC librarian/archivist Linda Morita, July 2016.
present, however they were confined to the restaurant. This transformation of the role of PO at the MCAC represents a distinct shift in the institution’s approach to the objects. Historically, their placement throughout the gallery spaces is in large part due to the legacy of the McMichaels’ and their early display of these items around their house to achieve a greater sense of a pioneer setting at Tapawingo. The PO presence in the galleries also reflected a more direct relationship with the art collection at the MCAC, as seen in their inclusion in the 1970/1973 collection catalogues. By the late 80s however, it is clear that their relationship to the rest of the MCAC collection had changed again.

6.3 1981 Summer Inventory

Records for the various inventories conducted during the MCAC’s closure during renovation are not complete, and therefore it is difficult to determine exactly how they are all related and to what extent they were meant to build upon or inform each other. However, what is clear is that an early report by the MCAC’s Registrar, Brian Stratton, appears to have set the table for the inventory and registration projects to follow. For example, a report from 1980 found in the ‘Registration Reports from B. Stratton’ registration folder called The McMichael Canadian Collection Status Report on Registration identified a lack of proper identification of “sculptural objects” in the registration files (2). Furthermore, the overall tone of the report implied that the entire registration process at the MCAC was in need of a drastic overhaul.

In the document 1981 Summer Inventory Report, Brian Stratton carefully outlined the methods, findings, and subsequent actions connected to an exhaustive inventory at the MCAC. Broadly speaking, the project sought to assess the institution’s current holdings by cross-referencing Board of Trustee minutes with the “known inventory of works” prior to Michael Bell’s arrival as Director. The goal of the 1981 inventory was to establish a new collection register and implement a new three-part number system that would encompass all types of Collection

44 The records are inconclusive with respect to the possibility that this report was part of or in fact the ‘management study’ mentioned in Bell’s 1983 Mclean’s article.
45 Registration folder: Registration. McMichael Canadian Art Collection.
46 The Advisory Board acted effectively as a Board of Trustees from 1966 to the Collection’s incorporation in 1972. At which point a Board of Trustees was established, therefore Advisory minutes fall under this label as well.
47 Document not paginated.
material. As mentioned in Event 3, the ‘S’ prefix represents the medium of the object and the number represents a unique identification number within the ‘S’ element of the Collection. The accompanying number then provides a unique identifier for the object within the broader sculpture category of the collection. In comparison, the three-part registration number introduced during the 1981 inventory removes the media-based prefix identifier, and replaces it with a number that corresponds to its donation to the Collection. For example, in the registration number ‘1980.5.12’, the first four digits represent the year of registration, the individual “5” represents a chronological donation number allotted to the object/group for that year, and the third number represents an item’s individual number within its donation group. This process was an important part in reorganizing the collection management practices at the MCAC, however, the significance of the inventories on the PO are clarified in an internal memo\(^{48}\) between Stratton and Bell dated April 17, 1982. In it, Stratton discusses the inventory as an opportunity to record the registered and unregistered holdings at the MCAC, while simultaneously using the inventory as a conduit for the implementation of new collection registration practices. As a result of the inventory, a total of 645 “works” at the MCAC were judged to have never received Board approval and nearly half of those were found without collection numbers\(^{49}\).

What it interesting when comparing these findings to the PO items discussed in Event 3 is that the PO were Board approved, but Board minutes suggest they never received collection numbers. The 1981 Summer Inventory Report’s lack of any defining discussion surrounding items accessioned but not numbered gives the overall impression that such items were not part of the project’s scope. Registration files present two projects that aim to account for, and clarify, the presence of these unregistered items. These projects are directly related to the process of registering the PO to the newly established CII.

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\(^{48}\) Registration folder: Artifacts General. McMichael Canadian Art Collection.

6.4 Creation of the Capitol Item Index

A single-page document\textsuperscript{50} from the “Artifacts General File” Registration folder outlines a project with the stated objective “[t]o establish an inventory of all capital items that the gallery is responsible for.” The document outlines three key factors for the project: the creation of object index cards; the methods and sources to obtain information for the cards; and a task list in order to track the project’s progress. The index cards created through this process were intended to record four critical pieces of information: a description of the object, a photo, proof of ownership or its source, and its identifying catalogue number.

The development of the card files was likely part of the 1981 summer inventory project that aimed to identify some of the 645 items highlighted by the inventory as questionable inclusions into the permanent collection register. Regardless, flipping through the cards in the CII, it is possible to find numerous wrought iron objects, farm tools, furniture, antique glassware and brass lamps in the catalogue. In other words, objects regularly referred to as pioneer object throughout this report constitute a significant portion of the Capital Items Index. Comparing the spreadsheet in Appendix D to A&M 4, it is clear many of the top rows in E.1 mirror the itemized list of objects in A&M 4. More importantly, Appendix D presents unique cross-reference numbers for these items by combining the date and Board meeting minutes that relate to their formal acquisition. For example, the pewter candlesticks mentioned in line one of A&M 4 also appear in Appendix D on top of the list and are numbered 37/6/745/1 and 2 accordingly. By developing an inventory number for items based on Board Minutes, these spreadsheets create a means to relate these items to collections documentation. In other words, the numbers reflect the fact that these items were acquired as part of Resolution 37 during the 6\textsuperscript{th} Board meeting of 1975, and they also represent the first and second items within that particular donation.

Nowhere on the spreadsheet is there any mention of the Capital Item inventory project, however, the Capital Items Inventory document lists Board Minutes as a source of relevant information in the development of the catalogue. Therefore, it is very likely that the spreadsheets represent part

\textsuperscript{50} Henceforth known as the “Capital Items Inventory” document.
Plate 8. Detail. Another page in the Capital Items inventory spreadsheets found in the MCAC’s registration folders. Notice the number written in pencil (166) below the initial inventory number. These sequential number represents the catalogue numbering system used in identifying the index cards in the CII.

of the inventory documentation that established basic temporary inventory numbers and information in order to identify each item and build the card catalogue records. Another clue is in the headings for columns four and five. Column four specifies Board approval for the items and relates to the larger collection inventory initiatives that occurred at the time. Column five builds on the CII inventory’s stated objective to include provenance information on the CII catalogue cards for each item.
Looking at the object index cards, the Board Minute numbers used during the inventory do not actually appear anywhere on the cards (see Plate 8). Typed in the top left corner, the index cards only show simple sequential numbers to distinguish each card from one another. The absence of the inventory numbers on the index cards suggest the transition from Board Minute number to sequential number was deliberate. For example, Plate 8 depicts a number penciled in under the more prominent typed Board Minute number allotted to the same object. The new smaller digit presents a closed registration system that isolates these items from the broader collection registration system and even the institutional histories of the objects. Although many of the card catalogues observed in the CII did provide donor names, date of donation, and resolution number to properly account for the acquisition of the items by the MCAC, it is important to note that this information can in no way replace how the three-part decimal collection number effortlessly relates each object to the entire collection. In other words, initiating a simple sequential object number for the items recorded in the CII not only deprives them of basic institutional information relating to its entry into the collection, but also separates them from the larger numbering system that formally recognizes each object’s place within the larger collection through its collection number. This process systematically separates the PO from the broader collection at the MCAC through the establishment of a separate register for the PO and other items determined to be ineligible for formal integration into the MCAC’s official collection register.

6.5 A Critical History of Collections Perspective on the CII

From a history of collections point of view, these inventory projects clearly demonstrate that Western institutions are sometimes prone to subjective discriminations when defining their collections. The permanent collection’s collection numbers were redefined to make more explicit the relationships between their acquisition histories at the MCAC. Conversely, the PO and the other items destined for the CII were given numbers that do not correspond to the rest of the MCAC’s holdings, nor do they provide evidence of their arrival at the MCAC. What is more striking is that these changes occurred regardless of the research into the collection’s acquisition histories that clearly showed PO were given the same Board approval required by the 1981
summer inventory as the standard for acceptance into the permanent collection. In other words, the CII reveals a bias towards the lack of importance projected onto the PO even though the 1981 Summer Inventory stated objectives included the assessment of the validity of the MCAC’s ownership of the items on site. Given the criticism of Robert McMichael’s management at the time, in conjunction with Michael Bell’s appointment as the new MCAC Director, these collection inventories and the subsequent re-registration of collection holdings under two very different protocols, suggests that there was an underlying ideological shift that occurred at the MCAC. A situation where previous collection procedures and decisions were questioned and new policies put in place in order to reframe the collection around a new registration paradigm.

Using various historical and procedural points of reference, the 1981 inventory of the MCAC collection not only established a new registration numbering system but also a new catalogue of objects. As part of this new catalogue, the PO were repositioned as capital items, a designation within the Collection’s records that removes them from the permanent collection register. Their separation from more prominent art collection registration records and the silence in public discussions of the objects, in conjunction with the termination of their presence in the gallery spaces, suggests a significant change in institutional interest and the importance given to the PO during this period, a fact that could, at least in part, explain their absence in Murray’s introduction published a quarter-century later.
Chapter 7
Conclusions

Event Summaries

Evidence presented throughout this paper demonstrates four defining moments in the MCAC’s attitude toward PO between 1965 and 1983. These relational fluctuations reveal the historical interest in, and Institutional perspectives framing, the presence of PO at Tapawingo. It has been shown that PO were a key part of the McMichaels’ early collecting practices. Their earliest acquisitions are connected to the deliberate creation of a homey, unpretentious art experience at Tapawingo, and a charming pioneer aesthetic. In this regard, Event 1 showed the documents surrounding the 1965 agreement framed PO as domestic material connected to the physical look and feel of the McMichael’s home, rather than as part of their art collection. What is most intriguing about Event 1 is how important these objects appear to be for the McMichaels during the beginning of their collecting activities, and yet, there is no explicit enumeration of them in the initial 1965 Agreement beyond a brief sentence in the introduction. Omitting PO from the MCAC’s initial collection scope removed the material from the institutional understanding of the McMichael’s collecting. In doing so, it reframes the pioneer objects within the new Institution and alters how we come to understand the McMichael’s collecting origins and early interests.

The significance of Event 2 stems in part from the resurgence of dialogue surrounding the PO in early collection catalogue introductions. In the 1970 and 1973 catalogues, the PO received specific mention for the first time. Although not collection items proper, pioneer objects were nevertheless framed as elements of the MCAC’s material holdings. The distinction that these items are not like official art collections material becomes clear when compared to the integration of IO in the 1973 and 1976 editions of the catalogue. During this era, IO spread through the catalogue and, in many ways, replicated official art collection material status through their presence in the IPS and catalogue lists. The PO however, remained footnote in the introduction in 1973, and were removed altogether in 1976. These patterns of recognition in the catalogue effectively elevated IO to art status while removing PO from the catalogue altogether, suggesting that the MCAC was expanding its perspectives to include indigenous art as art rather than as ethnographic material culture. Threby repositioning itself as an institution that focused exclusively on art objects. In other words, the MCAC catalogues represent a moment where the
gallery was outwardly cementing its image as an art gallery, at the expense of other historical items in the Collection.

Event 3 reveals an internal discrimination instantiated in collection policy and caused by the complexities of the 1965 Agreement to restructure the MCAC. Responding to pressure from the Provincial Auditor, the McMichaels attempted to clarify ownership of PO in the galleries at Tapawingo by donating personal furniture and the pioneer objects which helped to create the homey atmosphere in which they placed their art collection. This process was made possible in large part due to the McMichaels’ positions on the MCAC’s board, as well as Robert’s status as director. The 1975 donation is significant because it should have triggered processes to formalize the transfer of PO mirroring those used for the Indigenous art objects entering the collection as both kinds of objects were changing status at the time, the Indigenous art objects moving from ethnography to art, and the pioneer objects moving from décor to part of the collection proper. The donation records clearly show that the process of assigning a collection number to items entering the permanent collection was not consistent. Instead, the pioneer objects remained numberless. In addition, later correspondence between Robert McMichael and Michael Bell indicates that the McMichael’s never imagined they would be physically separated from the donated material, an insight that not only raises questions about the true intent of the donation, but also potentially explains the lack of PO collection numbers in the donation records. In short, discriminatory practices observed in Event 3 work strategically to placate external concerns of the auditor and stakeholders through the donation of PO, while exposing the McMichaels’ influence in the institutional practices surrounding the donation which simultaneously satisfied their own interests.

Event 4 involves the institutional projects that lead to the development of the CII inventory and the objectives that framed its development. The inventory was meant to identify MCAC property and verify the channels through which objects had entered the Institution’s holdings. Its creation marked the beginning of a new collection numbering system for CII items. The new numbers system distinguished the PO from the permanent collection material in naming and numbering practices. It also allows us to see the consequences of the MCAC’s dramatic executive and staffing changes. New perspectives on the management of the collection and the initiation of a comprehensive numbering system for CII objects surely represents Michael Bell and Brian Stratton’s solution to refining the MCAC’s collection to fit a new vision.
7.1 PO and Current Perspectives on the MCAC’s Collecting Histories

The silence regarding PO in Murray’s (2006) introduction to the MCAC collection takes on new light when considered in conjunction with the events detailed in this paper. Admittedly, her introduction is only five pages in length and does not pretend to be comprehensive in its scope, which makes covering all facets of the McMichaels “vision” a nearly impossible feat, but nevertheless her choice of a photograph which includes pioneer objects to visually introduce the McMichaels and their collection, a photograph that clearly depicts PO hanging above their artwork, provokes the reader to question how these objects relate to the broader story. As the photo proves, PO were part of the McMichael’s early collecting and had a lasting effect on the Institution’s subsequent development into the early 1980s. The PO presence within the collection at the MCAC, when viewed through the lens of Clifford’s critical history of collections framework, is revealed to be framed and reframed by various MCAC initiatives and policies. A PO presence at the MCAC not only speaks to the broader interests of the McMichaels’ collecting practices, but also bears witness to an institution that was in many ways ambivalent about its status as an art collection and constantly balancing the idiosyncratic legacy of its creation and its founders-cum-trustees.

Mapping the four Events provides a longitudinal interpretation of various influences that helped shape the collection and how the MCAC collects. Because the Events we have been tracking represent moments of observable discrimination, the case study shows the turbulent nature of collecting. For example, Events 2 and 3 arguably contradict one another in their approach to dealing with the PO at the MCAC. Event 2 shows that by 1976 the PO were removed from the MCAC collection catalogues. However, Event 3 indicates the same material was formally accepted into the MCAC collections, a situation that clearly demonstrates the fluid nature of a collection’s boundaries and the various circumstances demarcating these conceptual borders.

The PO at the MCAC act as historical witnesses to the policies and documents that helped shape the collection. More importantly, their trajectory within the historical records of the MCAC supplements historical perspectives on the collection exemplified by Murray and similar publications, some of which have been discussed. The analysis of PO helps underscore Clifford’s
assertion that “it is important to resist the tendency of collections to be self-sufficient” (Clifford 1994, 266). In other words, the project sheds light on various events that have played a role in suppressing certain collecting histories while emphasizing others (266). The key to this new insight is that it is focused not on the collection itself as the nexus of its meaning, but rather on the activities and policies that helped define what the MCAC collection is and was.

7.1.1 Cataloguing

Looking at the project as a whole, issues pertaining to cataloguing figure prominently. More specifically, the acts of recording—or not recording—and grouping items through these records has had a significant influence on the presence and treatment of the PO at the MCAC. Framed in this way, a central thread linking each event is the fact that each moment represents a situation whereby the way PO were catalogued and subsequently grouped fundamentally shifted their relationship to the Collection and facilities. For example, had PO been included in the collecting mandate and items listed in Section “C” of the 1965 Agreement, their relationship to the donation would have been more closely tied to the artworks than to the facility. From this point of view, such a relationship may have evolved into something that more like the ‘ensembles’ at the Barnes Foundation\(^\text{51}\). Win this version of events, Robert McMichael’s assessment that the PO’s shapes and designs “resemble abstract sculpture,” might have played a much larger factor in the display and interpretation at the Gallery (1986, 27).

Similarly, the decisions to differentiate the recording of PO in institutional documents throughout the mid 1970s and into the early 1980s had a profound effect on the present state of PO at the MCAC. The decision to omit collection numbers from the 1975 donation records created a situation where the MCAC took physical possession of the items, but had not actually attributed them any institutional designations. In other words, although the institution accepted the items, the lack of any formal collection number meant that they were not administratively connected to any other objects at the MCAC. Institutionally speaking, they were not actually part of the records that define the Collection. Rather, it appears that the cataloguing process may have

\(^51\) And online search of the Barnes Foundation’s collection display artifacts with a collection number.
been deliberately omitted in favour of supporting the private interests of the McMichaels. It is no wonder that future MCAC staff would question the nature of the PO’s relationship to the Collection. In this situation, the CII provides a platform to remedy the absence of a catalogue number, but does little to reconnect PO to the broader Collection. Using the example of the PO to contemplate museum collecting and collections in general, the findings of this research suggest cataloguing is not just an additive process. Its ability to create documents that define relationships between objects has the power to include as well as remove objects from collections.

7.2 Further Research

Research into the PO at the MCAC raised further questions surrounding the MCAC. Below are two topics believed to be natural extensions of the present research.

7.2.1 Signe McMichael

Robert McMichael’s (1986) presents Signe as a crucial collecting partner, however her opinion on their collecting is framed only through his writing. Although not discussed in the literature review, both Pearce (1998) and Belk (2006) consider collecting to be a highly gendered activity. Research into Signe’s role in developing a collecting practice as well as her role as a trustee at the MCAC could help further illuminate additional factors that influenced both the McMichaels’ personal collecting and the development of the collection at the MCAC. One example of her influence is the MCAC’s library, as Signe is credited with establishing and actively developing its early holdings.\(^{52}\)

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\(^{52}\) Correspondence with Linda Morita, McMichael Archivist/Librarian, October 2016.
7.2.2 Comparing the MCAC to Other Major Collectors and their Institutions

Robert McMichael’s autobiography presents a clear admiration for the Frick Collection in New York (1986, 130-131). Just like the Frick, the McMichaels donated not only their collection of art, but also their home and furnishings to the development of an institution to steward their collections. Furthermore, the McMichaels and the Fricks both succeeded in negotiating the right to continue living alongside the collection after their homes were institutionalized\(^\text{53}\). The shared interest in fostering collections at facilities that were historically the homes of the collectors raises interesting questions surrounding the definition of house museum and how that might apply to these examples. Should we in fact be discussing these institutions as house museums that also happen to act as gallery space for important collections of art? How would such a discussion reframe our approach to the collections these institutions hold? Are these collections inherently tied to their facilities, in what ways would their significance change if they were to move?

The Barnes Collection presents another institution where juxtaposition and analyses in conjunction to the Frick and the McMichael could prove insightful. Since the death of founder Albert Barnes in 1951, the Barnes Foundation has preserved his “wall compositions,” or “ensembles,” that combine art and artefact much like the early displays that included PO at the MCAC (The Barnes Foundation). What’s more, in 2004 the Foundation was successful in securing court approval to break part of founder Albert Barnes’ will and move part of the collection to a new facility in downtown Philadelphia\(^\text{54}\). In this instance, the Barnes Foundation did separate the collection from its original home-turned-institution, however they decided to preserve the original wall compositions developed by Albert Barnes. What does the replication of the original ensembles say about collections like the Barnes, Frick and McMichael? Are collections like these inseparable from their facilities? How would their significance as collections change if they were moved to spaces like the AGO, the Met or the Guggenheim?

\(^{53}\) Henry Clay Frick’s will stipulated his wife, Helen Frick, be allowed to occupy their home after it transformed into a public gallery (Henry Clay Frick, website).

More over would these new institutions feel compelled to accommodate or adopt certain aspects of these original facilities in order to present the collections?
References


Berton, Pierre. 1956. “The house that was made for Christmas.” *Canadian Homes & Gardens* (December): 9-12, 60-61.

CBC News. “McMichael gallery co-founder dies”. Last updated: Jul 05, 2007 10:01 PM ET. The page is no longer hosted by CBC.ca, however it is possible to access an archived version on the web.archive.org site:


55 ‘T3’ and ‘T4’ are listed as the page numbers in the magazine. Sequentially speaking, these pages correlate to page numbers 49 and 50 in the magazine.


http://mcmichael.com/about/history.cfm.


http://www.tandfebooks.com.myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/isbn/9780203428276


Appendices
Appendix A – Smith’s “Mandates In Comparison” list

Appendix C: MCAC Mandates In Comparison


   13. The Crown shall, with the advice and assistance of Robert McMichael and Signe McMichael, establish, develop and maintain in perpetuity at Tapawingo a collection of art reflecting the cultural heritage of Canada; the said collection shall be known as the “McMichael Conservation Collection of Art” (hereinafter called “the Collection”), and shall be comprised of paintings by Tom Thomson, Emily Carr, David Milne, A. Y. Jackson, Lawren Harris, A. J. Casson, Frederick Varley, Arthur Lismer, J. H. MacDonald, Franklin Carmichael, and other artists, as designated by the advisory committee, who have made contributions to the development of Canadian art.

2. Excerpt from 1969 amendment to the agreement, made by Hon. John P. Robarts:

   As the second paragraph of the preamble to the Agreement indicates, the Collection has always included not only paintings but also drawings, sculpture and artifacts. Accordingly, notwithstanding any apparent implication to the contrary in the Agreement, the Province has always contemplated that the Collection may be augmented through the acquisition, by donation or purchase, of works of a similar nature reflective of the cultural heritage of Canada.

Explanatory Note
The Bill establishes a non-share capital corporation, to be known as The McMichael Canadian Collection, to operate the McMichael Art Gallery.
The constitution of the Board of Trustees of the Corporation is set out, together with the powers and duties of the Board, and other related matters.
Provision is made for the guarantee by Ontario of loans to the Board for the purpose of carrying out its objects.
6. The objects of the Corporation are,
to hold, manage, control, maintain, exhibit, display, develop and stimulate interest in the collection for the benefit of the public;
to hold and preserve the lands described in the Schedule as a permanent site for a public gallery and related facilities for the collection;
to maintain and operate the gallery mentioned in clause b; and
to hold, manage, control, maintain, preserve, administer and develop the lands of the Corporation in conjunction with the operation of the gallery and for the benefit of the public.
7. The Board shall ensure that the art works and objects acquired from time to time as part of the collection are not inconsistent with the general character of the collection at the time of such acquisition.


Explanatory Notes
Section 1. Section 7 of the Act is re-enacted to ensure that the Board continues to maintain the present character of the collection.

...
Section 7 of the McMichael Canadian Collection Act, being chapter 259 of the Revised statutes of Ontario, 1980, is repealed and the following substituted therefore:

7. The Board shall ensure that the focus of the collection is the art work and objects created by,
(a) Tom Thomson, Emily Carr, David Milne, A. Y. Jackson, Lawren Harris, A. J. Casson, Frederick Varley, Arthur Lismer, J. H. MacDonald, Franklin Carmichael,
(b) the indigenous peoples of Canada,
and other artists who have made contributions to the development of Canadian art and whose art work and objects will be consistent with the general character of the collection.


Explanatory Note
The main provisions of the Bill are as follows:
To provide an English name and a French name for the corporation.
To increase the number of members of the Board.
To clarify the financial and administrative arrangements of the Board.
To clarify the objects and the collection mandate of the corporation

7.—(1) The objects of the Corporation are,
(a) to acquire art works, objects and documentary material for the collection;
(b) to preserve and exhibit the collection;
(c) to conduct research on and provide documentation for the collection;
(d) to stimulate interest in the collection;
(e) to conduct activities in order to enhance and complement the collection;
(f) to hold, maintain and use the land described in the Schedule to the McMichael Canadian Collection Act, being chapter 259 of the Revised Statutes of Ontario, 1980, as a permanent site for a public gallery and related facilities for the collection.

8. The Board shall ensure that the focus of the collection is the works of art created by Indian, Inuit and Métis artists, the artists of the Group of Seven and their contemporaries and other artists who have made or may make a contribution to the development of Canadian Art.


Explanatory Note
The Bill amends the McMichael Canadian Art Collection Act as follows:
1. The Bill recognizes the gift of the McMichael Canadian Art Collection in 1965 and the original vision of Robert and Signe McMichael for the collection. The Bill also recognizes that the focus of the collection has changed over time and that it is appropriate to return the collection to, and then maintain it in, the spirit of its original focus. (Section 2 of the Bill)
2. The composition of the Board of Trustees of the McMichael Canadian Art Collection is altered. Under the alterations, a new section 3.1 is added to the Act to emphasize that Robert McMichael and Signe McMichael are life members of the Board. If either of them is unwilling or unable to continue as a trustee, then provision is made for the McMichaels to appoint substitutes during their lifetimes. (Section 3 of the Bill)
3. The Board's powers to make by-laws and establish committees
and its power to appoint or remove the director are made subject to the Minister's approval until the day three years following Royal Assent to this Bill (or until such time as the collection conforms to section 8 of the Act, whichever is later). The Board is also limited in that its committees may be composed only of trustees, employees and volunteers of the Corporation. (Sections 4 and 6 of the Bill)

4. The Board is required to establish an art advisory committee. Initially the committee will consist of Robert McMichael and Signe McMichael, the chair and vice-chair of the Board and a trustee chosen by the Board from amongst the trustees appointed by the Lieutenant Governor in Council. The art advisory committee will make recommendations to the Board with respect to the acquisition and disposal of art works, objects and related documentary material. The art advisory committee is also empowered to designate the artists who have made contributions to the development of Canadian art. (Section 5 of the Bill)

5. The nature of the collection is redefined. The collection is to reflect the cultural heritage of Canada and to be comprised of art works, objects and related documentary material created by or about Tom Thomson, Emily Carr, David Milne, A. Y. Jackson, Lawren Harris, A. J. Casson, Frederick Varley, Arthur Lismer, J. H. MacDonald and Franklin Carmichael and those artists designated by the art advisory committee as having made contributions to the development of Canadian art. (Section 7 of the Bill)

6. The definition of “Minister” is updated. (Section 1 of the Bill)

... The purpose of this Act, as amended in 2000, is to recognize the following:

1. In 1965, Robert and Signe McMichael gave the people of Ontario their collection of Canadian art, their home, and 14 acres of surrounding lands.

2. The art collection, now known as the McMichael Canadian Art
Collection, was to display distinctively Canadian art reflecting the cultural heritage of Canada and the images and the spirit of the nation, focusing on those artists known as the Group of Seven and their contemporaries.

3. Robert and Signe McMichael had a vision that the gallery and the art collection that it housed would continue to retain the spirit that they had originally created by remaining true to its focus on those artists who had celebrated the nation's beauty in a uniquely Canadian way.

4. The focus of the collection has changed over time.

5. It is appropriate to return the collection to, and then maintain it in, the spirit of its original focus.

6. There should be an appropriate corporate structure to administer the collection.

7. There should be an art advisory committee to advise on matters related to the composition and display of the collection.

8. Robert and Signe McMichael should continue to have significant roles in matters related to the collection.

..., Section 8 of the Act is repealed and the following substituted:

Nature of collection

8. The Board shall ensure that the collection reflects the cultural heritage of Canada and is comprised of art works and objects and related documentary material created by or about,

(a) Tom Thomson, Emily Carr, David Milne, A. Y. Jackson, Lawren Harris, A. J. Casson, Frederick Varley, Arthur Lismer, J. H. MacDonald and Franklin Carmichael, and

(b) other artists who have been designated by the art advisory committee under clause 4.1 (2) (e) for their contributions to the development of Canadian art.
Appendix B - 1965 Agreement

In order to keep this section as concise as possible, the version of the 1965 Agreement presented here is from Robert Dowsett’s 1972 Report. The accompanying Schedule “C” was provided by Linda Morita and is a copy of the MCAC’s archive copy of the agreement.
IN WITNESS WHEREOF the parties hereto have, this 15th day of November, A.D. 1965, affixed their hands and seals, the Authority having affixed its seal as attested to by the hands of its proper signing officers duly authorized in that behalf.

WITNESS:

[Signature]

HER MAJESTY THE QUEEN IN RIGHT OF ONTARIO, represented by the Honourable John Parmenter Roberts, Prime Minister of Ontario,

[Signature]

ROBERT McMICHAEL

[Signature]

SIGNE McMICHAIL

THE METROPOLITAN TORONTO AND REGION CONSERVATION AUTHORITY

[Signature]

Chairman

[Signature]

Secretary-Treasurer
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<td>Rocks and waterfall</td>
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<td>Sketches of 8 Ontario Villages</td>
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<td>Sketches of Old Farm Houses</td>
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| Lawren Harris                 |          |          |
| Snow                          | oil on canvas | 27" x 42" |
| North Shore of Lake Superior  | oil on canvas | 28" x 35" |
| Shimmering Water              | oil on canvas | 32" x 40" |
| Red Maples                    | oil on panel | 10½" x 13" |
| Beaver Dam                    | oil on panel | 10½" x 13½" |
| Algoma Woodland               | oil on panel | 10½" x 13½" |
| The Ice House                 | oil on panel | 11½" x 14½" |
| Algoma Panorama               | oil on panel | 10½" x 14" |
| Montreal River                | oil on panel | 10½" x 14" |
| Lake Superior Cliffs          | oil on panel | 12" x 15" |
| Pic Island                    | oil on panel | 12" x 15" |
| Georgian Bay                  | oil on panel | 5½" x 8"  |
| Laurentians                   | oil on panel | 5½" x 8"  |
| Old Toronto Houses            | drawing   | 7" x 9"  |

<p>| Yvonne Mccague Housser        |          |          |
| Indian Girl                   | oil on canvas | 24&quot; x 30&quot; |
| Half Breed Village            | oil on canvas | 24&quot; x 30&quot; |
| Cobalt                        | oil on panel | 10&quot; x 10&quot; |
| Adriatic Docks                | oil on panel |          |</p>
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<td>oil on panel</td>
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<tr>
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<td>8 1/2&quot; x 12&quot;</td>
</tr>
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<td>drawing</td>
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<td>Mother and Child</td>
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<td>ARTHUR LISNER (Cont'd)</td>
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<td>Mountains and Clouds</td>
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<td>Patsy</td>
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<td>Boston Corners</td>
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<td>Relaxation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tom Thomson</td>
<td>Afternoon, Algonquin Park</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Rocks and Deep Water</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Islands, Canoe Lake</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sunrise</td>
<td>oil on panel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Moonlight and Birches</td>
<td>oil on panel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Purple Hill</td>
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<td>Moonlight, Canoe Lake</td>
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## TOM THOMSON (Cont'd)

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<td>Log Jam</td>
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<td>Springtime Algonquin Park</td>
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<td>Red Forest</td>
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<td>7&quot; x 10&quot;</td>
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<td>Fairie Lake</td>
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<td>Sailboat</td>
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<td>Head of a Woman</td>
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<td>Young Fisherman</td>
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<td>3 drawings of Deer</td>
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## F. H. VARLEY

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<td>Portrait of a Man</td>
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<td>Westcoast Inlet</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dead Tree, Garibaldi Park</td>
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<td>Eskimo Woman</td>
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<td>Mountains</td>
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Appendix C – 1975 Donation lists

C.1 Schedule “A” from the December 17, 1975 board minutes. The document presents a list of items donated as well as identifies additional lists of donations covered under Resolution #38.

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<td>8-56</td>
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<table>
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<th>Donor: Mr. Robert McMichael</th>
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<td>8-4</td>
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<tr>
<td>8-11</td>
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<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

| Miscellaneous (as per attached list) | |
|-------------------------------------| |
| Furnishings (as per attached list)  | |
| | |

Valuation Committee Meeting #3/75
Miscellaneous

Miscellaneous hand tools, vices, etc., including power drill in workshop

2 pewter candle sticks
1 antique candle stick
50 miscellaneous wrought iron artifacts
7 antique guns ($125.00 ea.)
1 Claude Taft carving, Three Canada Geese
1 Claude Taft, Mallard
1 Claude Taft, Pintail
2 pair of binoculars
1 carousel projector

TOTAL

C.2 Miscellaneous list (A&M 5) identified in Schedule “A”.
Appendix D – CII Spreadsheets

D.1 Capital Items inventory spreadsheet. Note the line that identifies the 1975 donation of PO listed in A&M 5. Additionally, the spreadsheet uses Board Minute dates and resolution numbers to generate a numbering system for the items.