



Tom Thomson's Toronto Neighbourhoods

by Angie Littlefield

Tom Thomson's Toronto Neighbourhoods

Tom Thomson (1877–1917) created some of Canada's most recognizable art from sketches made in Algonquin Park 1912–1917. His association with Ontario's north is well known. Tom Thomson's 12 years in Toronto are less known.

With map and backpack I head off from Union Station. I hope to find traces of Tom Thomson's lost Toronto years before he traveled to Algonquin Park in 1912 and before he moved into the Rosedale Valley Studio Building in 1914. I know he lived in boarding houses, had a girlfriend, went to Mendelssohn Choir concerts, the library, and the CNE. He took art lessons, worked for photoengraving companies, went on outdoor sketching trips, hiked, snowshoed and above all, demonstrated he was a family man.

I want to reclaim this Tom for Toronto. Leith, in the Owen Sound area, lays claim to Tom's growing years. Chatham and Seattle were short stops on the journey to the, "true north strong and free". Tom Thomson spent most of his adult life in Toronto.

Tom arrived in 1905 to a Toronto reeling from the aftershock of the great fire of 1904: 100 buildings and 140 businesses destroyed. The fire put six thousand people out of work at a time when Toronto had 200,000 residents. The downtown looked bombed. Buildings on both sides of Bay Street from The Esplanade to north of Wellington were in ruins. Firefighters couldn't contain the fire, stopped by the maze of wires from electricity, telegraphs and telephones.



Wellington Street East, looking west
April 1904
City of Toronto Archives | Series 402, Item 5
www.toronto.ca/archives/fire1.htm



Elm Street Methodist Church
Landmarks of Toronto
www.archive.org

The downtown Tom saw at this time was habitually blanketed by black coal smoke from factories, rail yards and ships at the waterfront. Sludge from the slaughterhouses flowed into the Don River. The fortunes made in mining and manufacturing showed up as mansions, one of which Holwood on Queen's Park Crescentⁱ was built in 1901–02 by money Joseph Flavelle accumulated in meat-packing.

From 1905–1908, Tom boarded on Elm Street on the eastern border of St. John's Ward, a working class area densely inhabited by new immigrants.

The block closest to Yonge where Tom lived bustled with the activities of the Elm Street Methodist Church and school, the Y.W.C.A., the New Jerusalem Synagogue, St. George's Hallⁱⁱ, which housed the St. George's Society that provided for the city's poor, Moriarity's School of Physical Culture which was also home to the Good Luck Athletic Club and St. George's Rink. The Women's Christian Temperance Union which ran the Willard Frances Home for Girls and the Central Flower Mission from that address and at number 49, the John Labatt Bottling Works.

Tom's block on Elm was home to a dressmaker, printer, barber, translator, dentist, phrenologist, physician, plumber, upholsterer, music teacher and even two sculptors. There were house painters at number 21, a grocer at number 53, a druggist at 55½ and a block west a branch of the Bank of Toronto and Edward Squirrel, liquors. Tom boarded at 54 with Joseph R. Walton, harness maker.

As I surveyed Tom's street I noted what survived: The Y.W.C.A., St. George's Hall, a few houses and a remnant of the House of Industry

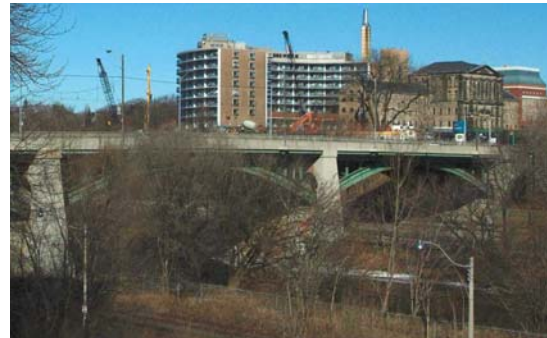
at 87 Elm. The House of Industry, like St. George's Hall, provided for the needy crowded into St. John's Ward.

Although Tom lived modestly, he was employed. By June 1905 he was in the art Department of Legg Brothers Photoengraving at 5 Jordan Street, in a pocket near Yonge and Wellington spared by the great fire. With Tom's previous photoengraving experiences in Seattle, brothers William, George and Archibald Legg had employed Tom as a senior artist. Tom was so proud of his new position that on one occasion when his sister Minnie visited en route from Owen Sound to St. Catherines, where she attended a young ladies' finishing school, he took her to each person in the Legg Brothers Art Department to explain what they were doing. He also took her to the tea room in George McConkey's Restaurant at 27 King Street West where according to Minnie he liked the atmosphere, the dainty teas and the class of people who frequented the establishment.

Tom had come to Toronto by himself in 1905, but, he was certainly not alone. He had regularly visited the home of his "uncle" William Brodieⁱⁱⁱ while he was growing up, drawn to his vivacious cousins, Jessamine, Lillie, Daisy, "Sweet William", Rose, Violet and Verbena. Brodie, a dentist by profession but a passionate naturalist at heart, lived in a tradesperson area at 436 Parliament Street with a yard full of wild flowers. The Brodie's four cows, kept across the



Toronto Don Jail | June 4, 1899
Fonds 200; Former City of Toronto fonds – Series 376
en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:DonJail1899.jpg



Toronto Don Jail | February 8, 2010
Mary Cook ©



High Park, Toronto, c1906
www.chuckmanothercollectionvolume3.blogspot.com/

Don River, were milked by the prisoners at the Central Jail, now called the Don.

Tom found a kindred spirit in his uncle who tromped through the Don's countless ravines gathering plant samples on legendary Sunday walks that wore out most family members. Tom, who grew up wandering the woodlands around Leith, cherished the walks which were regularly followed by talks with family and friends. According to Thomson scholar Joan Murray, Tom learned the art of finding and preserving specimens so well that he was commissioned to collect specimens for high school teacher David White. As a youth, Tom scoured two of uncle

Brodie's favourite collecting spots for samples—High Park and the Scarborough Bluffs.

By 1905, Tom's flower garden of cousins were married but Tom was still drawn to the aegis of his uncle's circle. Brodie, by then considered the first Provincial Biologist, had been friends with Ernest Thompson Seton^{iv}, a great naturalist, before and after the tragic death of Brodie's son "Sweet William"^v who was with Seton on a sample collecting canoe trip in 1883 when Willie drowned. Seton was a keen supporter of Brodie and the Natural History Society. Even when Seton was in Manitoba, Brodie read Seton's lecture on the striped gopher to the Society flourishing two skins, drawings and illustrations that Seton had sent.

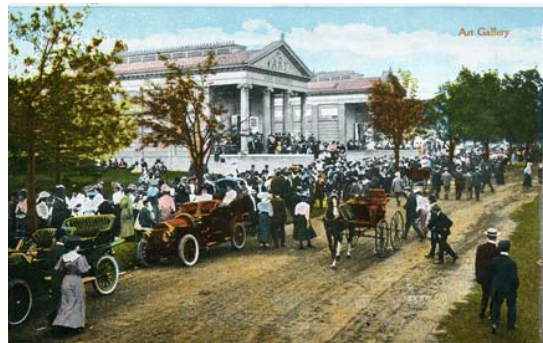
Also in Brodie's circle was Owen Staples who lived across from the Brodies on the east side of the Don River at 69 Hogarth Avenue in a house constructed with discarded bricks from the Don Valley Brick Works. Staples, an artist-illustrator first for the *Mail* and later for *The*

Evening Telegram was a member of the Ontario Society of Artists (OSA) and had published a six-volume edition of *Landmarks of Toronto*. He sketched and painted flowers and animals in the Don Valley and illustrated two of Brodie's scientific articles about plant galls.

Staples, was a founding member of Toronto's Mendelssohn Choir and a magnet for artists of all kinds. Whenever possible, Tom, who loved music, attended the choir's concerts or gave tickets to relatives so that they too could enjoy the finest choral music Toronto had to offer. Seton and Staples were key figures in the intellectual life of the Brodie home and thus by extension, major influences on Tom.

The ideas and influences of the Brodie circle were significant in Tom's life, but, they didn't keep Tom from visiting Owen Sound. Since Legg Brothers employed him at the princely sum of \$11 per week he headed off for quick family visits. A family member recalled that he'd take the Saturday train, leaving as soon as he finished work. He'd arrive late at night, trekking home in the dark summoning his family with a whistle. His sister Minnie later wrote that Tom's frequent visits home were occasions of excitement and rejoicing especially among the children of the older members of his family by whom he was greatly loved.

Back in Toronto he regularly ate chop suey and took evening art classes at the Central Ontario School of Art and Design at 165 King Street West where William Cruickshank an OSA member offered a course called "Drawing from the Antique and from Life". Tom's friend Ben Jackson later noted that



Art Gallery at Toronto Exhibition, c1911
Robert Little Collection

Tom had studied from life and the antique in art school; he remembered Cruickshank as the instructor.

Until 1909, 165 King Street was also the address for the Ontario Society of Artists which organized annual exhibitions on King Street and at the CNE. The OSA was known to Tom as they had sponsored an exhibition of 100 art works in Owen Sound in 1894 when Tom was 17 years old. Naturally he also knew the OSA and the Toronto Art Museum through Owen Staples and William Cruickshank.

With his expanded interest in fine arts, Tom purchased a leather-bound pocket book for sketches. On visits home between 1905 and 1907 he filled it with 22 works among which were drawings of his nephews Gordon Harkness and George Thomson II (who was visiting from Seattle). He did pen drawings of the Harkness Farm and Old William McMeen house, situated just across from his parents' Rose Hill farm, penned a self-portrait and started his first experiments with oils. "Sufficiency" an oil on board dates from 1905.

I first felt Tom's presence in Toronto while looking for the location



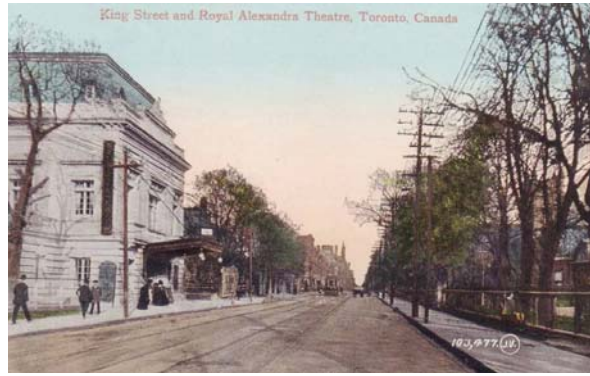
St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, c1913
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where he took art classes at 165 King Street. In Tom's time, the corner of King and Simcoe Street was known as the Four Nations Corner: Legislation, Education, Damnation and Salvation. The corners were home to Government House, Upper Canada College, St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, and to a popular pub called the British Hotel and Tavern.

The present day St Andrew's harkening back to 1875 arose out of an 1830 meeting to organize a Scot's kirk in the Town of York.

Knowing Tom's deeply religious Scottish up-

bringing I was drawn to believe that he could have stood in the comfortable church aisle where I did, especially when he first arrived in Toronto. I could almost feel him there. Once outside in the clear light of day, I realized Tom could as easily have frequented the British Tavern that once stood across the street.



Royal Alexandra Theatre, King Street, c1909
www.chuckmanothercollectionvolume3.blogspot.com

St. Andrew's and part of the first home of Upper Canada College still remain. Also nearby at Yonge and Adelaide is the street sign for Grand Opera Lane. In the early 1900s The Grand Opera House featured vaudeville and melodrama. As I looked up at the sign, alien amid skyscrapers, I wondered, did Tom go? Tom loved concerts and the theatre and there were many opportunities in his work-a-day neighbourhood: The Crystal Palace Theatre at 141 Yonge, the Gayety at 78 Richmond, the Majestic at 25 Adelaide, the Princess at 167 King St. West and as of August 1907, the Royal Alex Theatre.^{vi}

I was seeing bits and pieces of the Toronto through which Tom traversed as he was getting established. Yet even as that Toronto had changed significantly from 1905 to now, it was changing rapidly in Tom's time. By 1907, horse and carriage traffic increasingly shared Yonge Street with street car lines and automobiles. Buildings around 10 stories had sprung up in the vacuum created by the great fire.

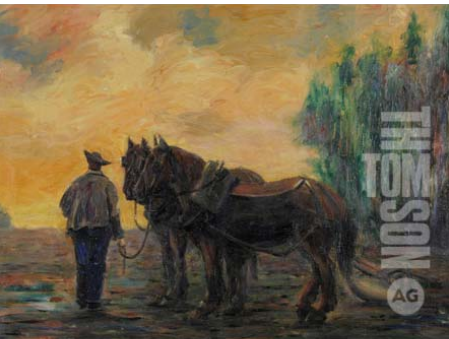
In 1908, art critic Augustus Bridle, founded The Arts and Letters Club which was to play an important part in Tom's future. When this gentleman's group first met at 57 Adelaide St. W. on the top floor of

the Court House building, artist Lawren Harris, Augustus Vogt, the founder of the Mendelssohn Choir and architect Eden Smith were some its first members. Dr. James MacCallum, patron of the arts, joined soon thereafter.

These early Toronto years were a time of family changes for Tom. His sisters Minnie and Louise had met brothers William and James Henry. After a double wedding in Owen Sound just before Christmas 1907 they headed off to farm in Saskatoon. His eldest brother George had sold his Seattle business college, moved to New York and started classes at the Art Students' League—the same place where family friend Ernest Thompson Seton had studied many years before while he did drawings for the American Museum of Natural History.

In 1907 George Thomson had one art work accepted into the National Academy of Design Annual Exhibition in New York and another into a group exhibition at the Art Institute of Chicago. This artistic success for his business-oriented lawyer brother, who gave up everything for art, spurred Tom on. After all, George had scant art background, whereas he, Tom, had worked at Maring and Ladd as a pen artist and engraver, at the Seattle Engraving Company and at Legg Brothers Photoengraving as a senior artist. William Cruick-

shank, his teacher at the Central Ontario School of Design had favourably reviewed his oil of a man leading a team of horses, a painting he gave to his sister Minnie two days before her wedding in 1907. With four years of commercial art experience, and art talent lauded by his family and teacher, Tom was the Thomson brother



Farmer Leading Two Horses, c1907
www.tomthomson.org

who should be an artist. Tom stepped up his artistic experimentation in 1907 and 1908.

Tom also took some new directions. Following his teenage tutelage in uncle Brodie's family discussions, the adult Tom joined the discussions around Dr. Albert Durrant Watson, poet, astronomer and mystic who by all accounts possessed a mind inquisitive about all forms of belief and who led vibrant discussions about spirituality and the arts. Dr. Watson practiced and resided at 10 Euclid Avenue. Sister Minnie who acknowledged that Tom had quiet moods added that he dearly loved an argument and generally held his own in a battle of wits. Dr. Watson's works *The Sovereignty of Ideals* (1904), *The Sovereignty of Character* (1908) and later works of poetry would have fueled much discussion.



William Wilfred Campbell
c1919 | McClelland & Stewart

Tom's discussions were grounded in reading. An avid reader since youth, Tom borrowed books and magazines from the Central Circulating Library^{vii} on the northeast corner of Church and Adelaide and read them late into the night as his father had. Like his mother, Tom was partial to poetry but he was also said to have had a keen interest in the *Studio* arts magazine. One of Tom's favourite poets was William Wilfred Campbell whose collected poems appeared in 1905 and whose lines Tom had illustrated.

Thus, with work, family, friends, reading and hiking Tom was leading a rich life in Toronto. Then, probably in 1905 there was an enhancement. Tom started keeping company with Elizabeth McCarnen (1871-1957), a young lady of Irish descent.

Elizabeth came from the farming community of Phelpston. She was Tom's first social companion after Alice Elinor Lambert who Tom had met in Seattle at his brother's boarding house when she 18 and he 27.



The Toronto Public Library main branch (the old Mechanics' Institute) on Church Street, c1924
www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Public_Library_on_Church_Street.jpg

Whatever happened in the summer of 1904 during their boarding house romance, (the scuttlebutt had it that Alice suppressed a giggle at his marriage proposal), Tom abruptly left Seattle and composed himself at home in Owen Sound before venturing forth to his new life in Toronto.

Although it is pure conjecture, I believe that Tom met Elizabeth through his sister Minnie. During her Toronto visits Minnie stayed at the Y.W.C.A. on Elm Street where Elizabeth most likely resided. Minnie would have seen that this lively young woman, described as artsy, would provide Tom with company and a dancing partner.

Tom loved to dance. The Thomson home in Leith was the scene of many musical evenings where one visitor later recalled that it was a great place to dance. "I can still see Tom Thomson dancing."^{viii} His sister Minnie stated that Tom would sometimes make a special trip home from Toronto to attend a dance in the old hall with the Leith and Annan crowd of his youth. Matched up with Elizabeth in Toronto, there were the dance pavilions on Centre Island and at Hanlan's Point and in the winter, hotels had ballrooms—from the classy Chrystal Room of the King Edward, built in 1903 to the Gladstone on Queen Street West.

With Tom and Elizabeth's shared interest in the arts, there were exhibitions to see at the Art Museum of Toronto which Tom knew from his art lessons at the same location and at the CNE. According to one story, Tom took Elizabeth to a CNE sideshow of African natives

in their natural surroundings where the mesmerized Tom stayed put for the next three and a half hours. Afterwards Tom returned to study the natives three more times!

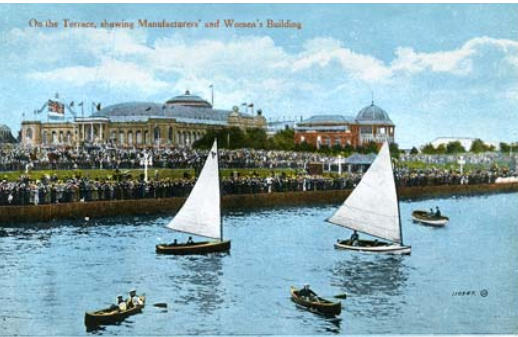
After four pleasant establishing years in Toronto, 1908–1909 held significant turning points. Late in 1908, Tom moved to the boarding house of Esther Plewes at 99 Gerrard Street East—now in the midst of the Ryerson University Campus. As I contemplated the few residential buildings left on Gerrard, I watched a young man leave what was obviously a boarding house. That young man conjured up the image of Tom dashing by such buildings on the way to his new job at Grip Engravers, Limited where he'd started to work under the direction of J.E.H. MacDonald late in 1908.

J.E.H. MacDonald, a founder of the later Group of Seven, worked at Grip before going to England; he returned there as senior artist in 1907. Back in Toronto, MacDonald designed and helped build a modest cottage at 475 Quebec Avenue in the High Park area—quite a hike from his place of employment. Since Grip was at 48 Temperance Street, Tom could either walk or take the streetcar down Yonge.

Grip's Art Director, Albert H. Robson described Tom's request for employment saying that he had arrived clean cut and dressed in a dark blue serge suit with a gray flannel shirt. "He handed me a bundle of his work and asked if there was an opening in the art department."^{ix} Obviously the portfolio was meritorious as Tom joined a talented group of commercial artists at Grip who were



Hanlan's Point "View from The Dips", c1910
To the right are the Circle Swing and Dance Hall
www.chuckmanothercollection.blogspot.com
cec.chebucto.org/ClosPark/HanPoint.html



Toronto Exhibition, c1911
Robert Little Collection

shared a keen interest in the fine arts and the outdoors. Among them were Ben Jackson, Tom McLean and Frank Johnston. In 1908 MacDonald and Tom McLean had works in the annual OSA exhibit.

Beside new beginnings, 1909 held painful closings. Tom's beloved uncle

Brodie who had had the lenses of both his failing eyes removed by Dr. James MacCallum, in an attempt to salvage some vision, died in August. He was buried in the Necropolis Cemetery in an unmarked grave overlooking the Don Valley. Brodie's loss was matched by another when Elizabeth McCarnen left for Phelpston to help raise the children of two siblings who had lost spouses.

With both uncle Brodie and Elizabeth gone, Tom turned more to companionship through work. He started going on outings with fellow Grip employees. Over the next two years Tom went to the Humber Valley with Frank Johnston, to Lake Scugog with Ben Jackson and with others to Weston, Lambton Mills and York Mills. Early Thomson chronicler, Blodwen Davies, noted that one of Thomson's first experiences in sketching from nature was by Scarlett Road near the Lambton Golf Club. The painting, "On the Don River", from this period, is marked 99 Gerrard Street on its rear.

Davies related a family incident that showed how sensitive Tom was about these early artistic ventures. When Tom and his eldest brother were home in Owen Sound for a family visit, Tom was disturbed by George's comments on one of his works. "At two o'clock he got up and dressed and slipped out of the house. By breakfast time he was back with a sketch that answered his brother's criticism."^x

Sensitive as he was to criticism, Tom had a wonderful support group at Grip. Between 1910 and 1911, William Smithson Broadhead and Arthur Lismer, both from Sheffield, England joined Grip as did Franklin Carmichael. Robson described the Grip as being a place full of fun and good spirits. In 1910 Tom painted "View from the Window at Grip". Symbolically Tom's experiences with Grip companions now provided the views through which he saw the world.^{xi}

In 1910 Tom's Grip supervisor and mentor, J.E.H. MacDonald was elected an OSA member and had four works accepted whose titles alone indicate their influence on Tom's development: "Clearing After Rain – Magnetawan River", "October Afternoon", "A Grey Day" and "Wind, Rain, Sunshine". Frank Johnston and A.Y. Jackson were also represented in the 1910 OSA show.

Tom was as popular with the Grip crowd for his fishing, singing and mandolin playing as for his sketching. Ben Jackson, himself a capable fisherman claimed that he'd never seen anyone who could cast a fly with the ease and precision of Thomson. Ben and Tom took trips to go lunge fishing in Lake Scugog and trout fishing in Tom's favourite streams about which his famous fisherman father John Thomson had probably told him. Blodwen Davies, who extensively interviewed Tom's family and colleagues after his death, said that Thomson with his mandolin was one of the best loved figures in that adventuring little company.

The Grip crowd kept Tom busy, but, it wasn't his only social life. Tom befriended fellow borders at 99 Gerrard. Tom was close friends with lodger Edgar Burke^{xii}, an engineer with the Canadian National Railway and with John McRuer^{xiii}, recently graduated as a doctor. He



Scarboro Bluffs
www.chuckmanothercollection.blogspot.com

is said to have been best man at both their weddings in 1909—Burke married in Brampton and McRuer in Huntsville.

On a painting trip to Huntsville area in 1910, Tom visited the newly-wed McRuers, John and Edythe at their home on Main Street where John’s brother was staying with them recuperating from a bout with tuberculosis. Tom eagerly took the McRuer brothers to his room in the Dominion Hotel where, “he opened his pack and excitedly spread out on the bed four feet of his brilliant sketches The air in the room was heady with the scent of oil paints.”^{xiv} James McRuer, later Chief Justice of Ontario, was allowed to pick two paintings which he proudly displayed in all his offices thereafter.

A few days later, on the weekend, James McRuer recalled that he, Tom, John and Edythe took the train north, ostensibly to scout locations for Tom’s paintings, but really just for an outing. Tom, who was an eager photographer at that time, took separate photos of James and John McRuer—James wearing his bowler hat standing in a field and John at the Scotia Junction train station.



Throughout these five to six years in Toronto, Tom continued to be drawn to the outdoors in all seasons. His hikes ranged east to the Scarborough Bluffs and into his family’s ancestral lands in Durham, north up the Don Valley to the Brodie’s Craigieburn farm in Whitchurch and west into Mississauga. Lawren Harris described Tom getting his winter exercise by snow shoeing through Toronto’s half-wild ravines at night.

Tom also continued to interact with his family. When his brother Fraser, a haberdasher in Mon-

Sydenham Mutual Fire Ins. Co.
c1911 poster
www.tomthomson.org

treat, visited in 1910, he and Tom went to see an exhibition—probably at the Arts and Letters Club as J.E.H. MacDonald actively promoted the club and its events. Fraser quizzed his brother as to why he didn't like a particular piece and Tom replied that the artist had to paint as he saw the scene if it was going to be natural and last. According to Tom, there had been too much artifice in the work. In 1911 Tom went to the Arts and Letters Club to see MacDonald's sketches and met Lawren Harris there.



Near Owen Sound 1911
National Gallery of Canada (no. 4702)
www.cybermuseum.gallery.ca

On a family visit to Owen Sound, Tom created a poster for his brother-in-law Tom Harkness for the Sydenham Mutual Insurance Company and he did a watercolour of his favourite niece, Jesse Harkness who would in later years visit him in Toronto staying at the on Elm Street. On another 1911 trip to Owen Sound with Ben Jackson who was Grip's specialist in tourism publicity, he painted "Near Owen Sound" and "On the Sydenham River".

By the time 1912 rolled around, the life Tom had established in Toronto was about to change. Fellow Grip artist Tom McLean had been a prospector, fire ranger and surveyor in the north before he developed his vocation in art. His constant paeans of praise about Algonquin Park stirred Tom and Ben Jackson. Tom and Ben were as keen for the fishing as for the sketching. Tom McLean provided the two with a letter of introduction to Algonquin Park Superintendent G.W. Bartlett and in May 1912 off they went.



Portrait of niece
Jessie Harkness,
c1910
www.tomthomson.org



Near Lake Scugog, c1911
www.tomthomson.org

Buoyed by his previous painting expeditions with Ben Jackson to Lake Scugog in 1911 where he'd painted "Near Lake Scugog" and "Evening Lake Scugog", Tom planned to be on the road from May to September 1912—first with Ben and then with William Broadhead. Tom gave up his lodgings with Esther Plewes and started a series of temporary lodgings, the first with Noah Luke at 54 Alexander Street.

After the Algonquin trip with Ben where he visited the Canoe Lake Station and Tea Lake Dam, Tom moved temporarily to 119 Summerhill Avenue, where Grip co-workers William Smithson Broadhead and Arthur Lismer boarded. The Sheffield men still glowed from the success of their 1912 OSA showing that spring where they had six works accepted between the two of them.

Shortly thereafter Tom and Broadhead traveled in the area of the Mississagi Forest Reserve west of Sudbury from July to September. En route they spent two nights at Hugh Trainor's winter home and boarding house in Huntsville where he began a friendly relationship with their daughter Winnifred then a 28 year old bookkeeper in Kearney. Hugh Trainor, foreman for the Huntsville Lumber Company, had a cabin at Canoe Lake.

Back from these heady travels into the wild, Tom moved to the home of the Mrs. Martha McKenzie at 61 Breadalbane Street. The widow's rooms may have been recommended to him by the Reverend William Wilson of the Elm Street Methodist Church as the reverend

lived at 42 Breadalbane. Rev. Wilson's church had been Tom's neighbour during his four years on Elm Street.

When I finally found the very short street called Breadalbane, it was one huge empty lot awaiting development. By contrast all of Summerhill was intact. As I started musing about neighbourhood survival, the mail person interrupted to ask why I was staring at number 119 Summerhill. I had been trying to figure out of which windows Tom, Broadhead or Lismer might have looked.

Barely a month after his return from the north, in October 1912, Tom joined fellow artists who left Grip to continue to be under the inspirational leadership of Art Director Albert Robson. Robson had gone to Rous and Mann Press at 72 York Street. Tom started at Rous and Mann Oct 16, 1912 as an artist at 75 cents an hour working 46.5 hours per week.

Robson described Tom's arrival at work at Rous and Mann in October 1912. He had strolled up from the Station in his woodsman outfit carrying a bundle of sketches. After leaving the works for inspection, Robson and the fellow artists he knew from Grip urged Tom to paint one into a large canvas. Robson gave Tom the keys to use the studio at Rous and Mann on the weekends and evenings. And thus, "Northern Lake" came into being.

Also in October 1912 Tom met Dr. James MacCallum at J.E.H. MacDonald's studio in the Imperial Chambers at 32 Adelaide Street, a studio MacDonald shared with J.W. Beatty. Tom knew of Dr. MacCallum as the ophthalmologist who had operated on his uncle Brodie's eyes; now he saw him as an art patron.

Although Dr. MacCallum met Tom at MacDonald's studio, he had heard of him from the summer of 1912 when MacCallum's friend



Northern Lake
National Gallery of Canada (no. 4705)
www.cybermuseum.gallery.ca

Colonel Mason and his two nephews had come upon Tom and Broadhead near the whitewater rapids on the Audinandong River salvaging sketches that had gone into the water when their canoe had tipped. MacCallum, intrigued by the stories of the pictures, and by the tall, intense man he had met at MacDonald's, determined to take a look at these works. MacCallum knew that Tom boarded

on Isabella Street. As he didn't have a number, he rang all the door bells on Isabella until he found the correct rooms.

Tom was out, but, MacCallum was granted permission to look around. MacCallum, as a former resident at 94 Isabella Street, a building that still stands today, was probably well known in the neighbourhood. He described the walls as covered with sketches of lightning flashes, moving thunder storms and with trees lashing in the wind. Blodwen Davies quoted Dr. MacCallum as saying, "As I looked over his sketches, I realized their truthfulness, their feeling and sympathy with the grim, fascinating northland. Dark they were, muddy in colour, tight and not wanting technical defects, but they made me feel that the North had gripped Thomson, as it had gripped me."^{xv}

In April 1913 Tom displayed "Northern Lake" at the OSA's Forty-First Annual Exhibition. The 1913 exhibition was a total triumph for the old Grip crowd. Johnston, Carmichael, MacDonald, McLean, Lismmer and Varley were all represented with MacDonald's "The Lonely North" reproduced in the catalogue. Even Tom's brother George whose address is listed as in New Haven had a work in the show.

Tom was to spend very little time at Rous and Mann. The sale of "Northern Lake" to the Ontario Government for \$250 in April 1913, made it easy to make his decision to paint full time. According to Lismer, Tom cashed his cheque in \$1 bills, took them home, threw them in the air and danced a fandango. It must have gratified Tom even more to know that his former teacher William Cruickshank had been part of the government's OSA selection panel. It didn't hurt that studio-mates J.W. Beatty and J.E.H. MacDonald were on the OSA's Executive Council.

Tom took a two month leave of absence from Rous and Mann and headed up north in May 1913 to sketch, fish and work as a fire ranger on the Metagami Reserve just south of Timmins. He went alone.

It was during this summer when Tom was a fire ranger on the Metagami Reserve that he met Grey Owl aka Archie Belaney. Many years later, Grey Owl remembered that he met many fire rangers on Lake Minnissinaqua, but, Tom stood out as the one who painted and made especially good donuts. Belaney also remembered that Tom had taken him to the Arts and Letters Club in the winter of that year.^{xvi}

The two month leave from spring 1913 stretched to November. Tom returned to Toronto via Huntsville, probably staying at the Trainors as his friend Dr. John McRuer and his wife Edythe had left for a tuberculosis sanatorium in Denver, Colorado.^{xvii}

Dr. MacCallum again visited Tom in his Isabella^{xviii} rooms and ended up taking half the sketches to his home on 26 Warren Road near St. Clair to better study them. On the back of "The Light that Never Was" MacCallum wrote, "Thomson saw this early morning—he



Grey Owl (Archibald Belaney)
by Yousuf Karsh, 1936
www.cybermuseum.ca

had spent all night in a canoe out on the lake because of the flies – 1913 MacCallum”.

Impressed by the 1913 output, MacCallum showed the works to A.Y. Jackson and then arranged for the two to meet at Lawren Harris’ studio at Yonge and Bloor over the Bank of Commerce. MacCallum also offered to cover Tom’s expenses so that he could devote himself full time to art. Harris and MacCallum had an idea for a better residence for Tom. They were working on constructing the Studio Building in the Rosedale Valley Ravine to be a home for artists.

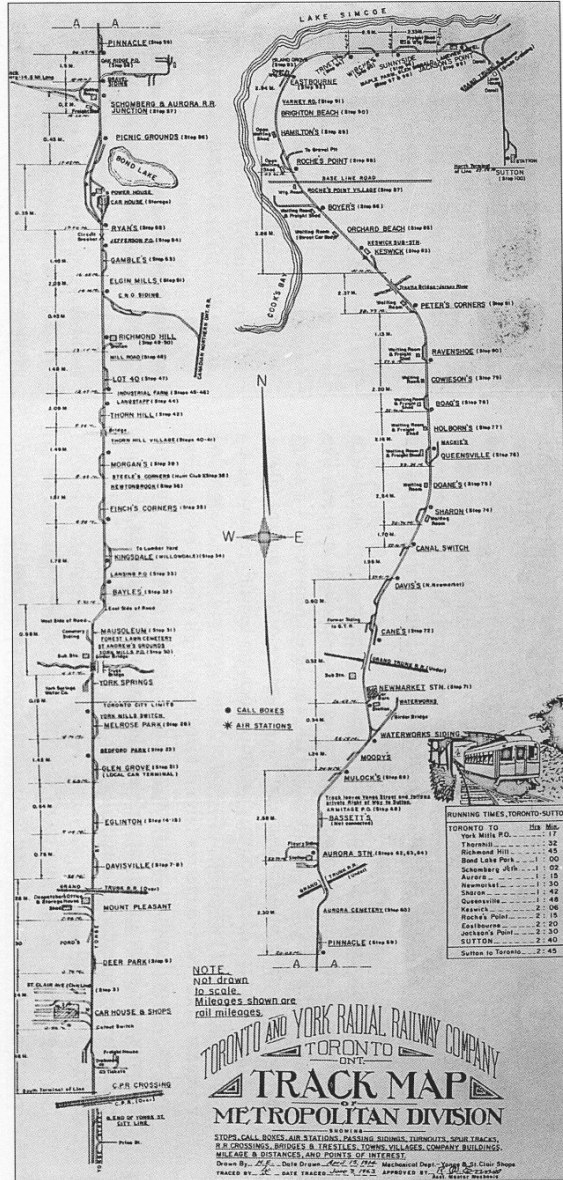
By 1913 Tom had moved to 66 Wellesley Street where he boarded with Frank Gavin a bartender at the C.P.R. hotel. Incredibly enough 66 Wellesley still stands. I tried to ignore the Kentucky Fried Chicken and barbershop signs as I took it in. The building, for a brief time in the 1980s the home of the Toronto Aids Committee, was larger than Tom’s other boarding houses. I realized that Tom probably had more space in this abode, enough to paint. This was borne out by Franklin Carmichael who according to Blodwen Davies visited Tom there. Carmichael found Tom at work on the sketches from his 1913 summer trips. “The room was thick with smoke and there was Tom with his huge canvas. It was a northern scene, a distant line of shore and a vast expanse of grey and soggy sky.”^{xix}

It was at 66 Wellesley that Tom received a phone call from J.E.H. MacDonald who had moved to the Village of Thornhill^x. J.E.H. needed help. MacDonald had undertaken a commission from Toronto General Hospital to design and illustrate a bound presentation album for the lieutenant-governor of Ontario and a pamphlet depicting the new hospital’s interiors including operating rooms and equipment. Joseph Flavelle, then Chairman of the Toronto Hospital Board had set a tight deadline.

Upon MacDonald's call, Tom took the Toronto and York Radial Railway to Thornhill where J.E.H. and former Grip workmate Stanley Kemp met him. "I can still see MacDonald and me standing as reception committee, watching the last radial car come down the hill and then up the hill, and then blessed relief, Tommy Thomson getting off as promised. Three pairs of hands, being pumped like pump handles".^{xxi}

MacDonald's son Thoreau recalled, "I hung around hoping to hear something about the North but can only recollect Tom smiling and quietly working".^{xxii}

By January 1914 Tom was in Studio One at the Studio Building on 25 Severn Street with A.Y. Jackson. It was still under construction. Although Tom had Severn Street as his permanent address for the next three years, he spent as much time as he could up north. These years from 1914–1917 are no longer Tom Thomson's lost Toronto years. They are very well documented with some interesting exceptions.



Toronto and York Radial Railway Map, c1914
www.wikipedia.org | Georgina Pioneer Village



Royal Alexandra Theatre, c2007
Mary Cook©



St. Andrew's Church, c2007
Roy Thomson Hall in foreground
Mary Cook©

In 1915 Tom found the time to go to Ottawa to visit his sister Margaret who was training to become a teacher. In November 1915 he went to Owen Sound to see his sister Minnie Henry who was visiting from Saskatoon. When Tom's niece Jesse Harkness came to Toronto to take art courses, she stayed at the Y.W.C.A, on Elm Street and Tom visited with her there and gave her tickets to theatre and music events.

Also in 1915, recently back from studies in Europe, the artist Florence McGillivray^{xxiii} visited Tom in the Studio Building. Florence had painted in the north in 1914 and her painting "Afterglow" from around that time eerily echoed Tom's works. Although there was a significant age difference, there must have been some attraction as Florence continued to visit him in the Shack in 1916 and visited Tom at Mowat Lodge in the spring of 1917. Florence's permanent address was on Frank Street in Ottawa. During 1916–17 when she exhibited with the OSA and befriended Tom, Florence gave her address as Whitby where she had relatives. Florence's calling card and an invitation to her 1917 art exhibition were found in his sketch box after his drowning. When Tom was dead, Florence drifted back to Ottawa.

As I muse on this relationship, I realize that I'm done with my reconnoitering. Finding no places still standing on Alexander and Isabella streets where Tom could have lived, I double back along the very pleasant Dundonald, a residential street that appears more reminiscent of Tom's times in Toronto. I have come to the end of chasing Tom's spirit around Toronto and head back to Union Station.



Saturday Morning Class copying pictures
Art Gallery of Toronto, c1931 | Arthur Goss, photographer
City of Toronto Archives, RG 8-2-12 | www.toronto.ca

As I stomp downhill past the clock tower of the former St. Charles Tavern which had itself originally been a fire hall, the tired old facades on stretches of Yonge Street hearken back to the days when these were much fresher daily scenery on Tom's trips to work. I'm walking in Tom's foot steps.

Months later on an outing to the Royal Alexandra, as I head to the Delta Chelsea on Gerrard to drop off a friend, I keep seeing signs of Tom on the streets he trod: Temperance, King, Gerrard, York, Adelaide. I realize that even when I'm not looking for Tom, I keep seeing him. Tom might have immortalized Algonquin Park but he will never leave Toronto.

I no longer have to look for Tom in Toronto. He's everywhere.

- i Holwood, now called Flavelle House is part of the University of Toronto Law School
- ii In 1919, St. George's Hall at 14 Elm Street became the home of the Arts and Letters Club.
- iii William Brodie, first cousin to Thomson's grandmother Elizabeth Brodie Thomson, was closer in age to Thomson's father John and hence the "uncle" designation bestowed on him by the Thomson children.
- iv In 1907 Seton made a 2000 mile canoe trip mapping northern Canada; in 1901 he was chairman of the founding committee of Boy Scouts of America serving as Chief Scout from 1910–1915.
- v Willie Brodie was 19 years old when he died. He had already collected samples for the Smithsonian, won 11 first prize awards at the 1881 Industrial Exhibition (forerunner of the CNE) and had his lecture on western Canadian samples read by his father to the Natural History Society.
- vi The Royal Alexandra Theatre, built at the cost of \$750,000 opened Aug 26, 1907 with a pantomime "spectacle" called Top O' Th' World.
- vii The Central Library was the former Mechanics Institute which merged into Toronto's Library system in 1883. Mechanics Institutes were modeled on adult education organizations in Edinburgh and London that existed to instruct and improve the skills of apprentices and working men. The building had a Reading Room and a Music Hall.
- viii Wilson Buzza, 74 years of age, quoted in Owen Sound Sunday Times, Jan. 12, 1977
- ix Albert Robson Tom Thomson p 5
- x Blodwen Davies Tom Thomson p 88
- xi Ironically, the view from Grip included the Star Theatre at 23 Temperance Street which opened in Aug 26, 1901 with a company of burlesques. By 1906 it was also showing movies.

- xii In *The Sun*, Swift Current, September 6, 1963 Mr. Burke reminisced that the Fairy Lake sketches were painted for him at the time of his wedding.
- xiii Dr. McRuer opened a practice in Huntsville where he remained until 1913
- xiv Patrick Boyer *A Passion for Justice: The Legacy of James Chalmers McRuer* p 26
- xv Davies p 41
- xvi Archie Belaney quoted in undated newspaper source. The article is titled “Knew Famous Tom Thomson as Good Doughnut Maker: Finally Learns True Identity of His Former Close Friend” i
- xvii McRuer died in Colorado in July 1917. His metal casket was brought home to the family plot in Ayr by his brother, ironically, at the same time as George was bringing Tom home to Leith
- xviii Tom may have boarded with Robert Holmes, on OSA member whose address is listed as 24 Isabella.
- xix Davies *Tom Thomson* p 34
- xx The MacDonalds were much on the move during these years. They had moved from Quebec Avenue to 108 Conduit before heading to Thornhill.
- xxi S.H.F. Kemp “A Recollection of Tom Thomson” quoted in *Little, The Tom Thomson Mystery* p 178
- xxii Ottelyn Addison *The Algonquin Years* pp 84–85
- xxiii Tom and Florence had much in common. Her family had come from Scotland on the *Alert*, the same ship as Thomson’s grandmother and uncle Brodie, both had William Cruikshank as instructors, both were admitted to the OSA at approximately the same time and both appreciated the aesthetic richness of northern Ontario landscapes.



One of Tom Thomson's palettes



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