



Detail, Ishbel Aberdeen, "Guisachan, B.C.," 1891. Kodak photograph from *The Guisachan Album*, private archives owned by the current Lord Aberdeen. (Photo: Courtesy of Lord Aberdeen)

“Kodaking and Being Kodaked”: The Guisachan Album of Ishbel, Lady Aberdeen

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Late in the evening of 14 October 1891, Lord and Lady Aberdeen took possession of the 480-acre property in British Columbia's Mission Valley (now the Central Okanagan) that they had purchased, sight unseen, the year before, during the course of their first visit to Canada in 1890. Until that point they had had no connection with Canada. John Campbell Gordon (1847–1934), first Marquess of Aberdeen and Temair, and his wife Ishbel Maria, née Marjoribanks (1857–1938)¹ married in 1877, creating a “loving, progressive and activist union,”² as historian Veronica Strong-Boag elegantly puts it, and, both as a couple and as individuals, they engaged with various political and social causes. They divided their time among Haddo House, Lord Aberdeen's ancestral Aberdeenshire estate in northeastern Scotland, Edinburgh, and London and spent a brief period as viceregal couple in Ireland in 1886, returning there for a longer period from 1906 to 1915. The period of the Aberdeens' intense engagement with Canada falls between the two Irish postings, beginning with their cross-Canada railway journey in 1890, and the purchase of their first property in British Columbia's Okanagan Valley. The next year, following their visit to the property that they named Guisachan, and enamoured of the Okanagan's rich possibilities for fruit growing, they purchased a second property, the Coldstream Ranch in Vernon in the north end of the Valley. There they planned to sell some of the land for lots that could be used for planting orchards on a large scale. Two years later, in 1893, they were appointed Governor General and viceregal consort to Canada, a decision prompted in part, one assumes, by their well-publicized business ventures in British Columbia and obvious interest in the country. The end of their viceregal tenure in Ottawa in 1898 did not, however, signal the end of their sustained personal and financial commitment to the Okanagan and Canada: that ended when they sold the Guisachan farm in 1903 and the Coldstream Ranch in 1906, both sales prompted by accumulating financial losses and their inability to handle the enormous financial burden by themselves.³ This paper focuses on the ten days the Aberdeens spent at Guisachan in 1891, a period marked by their optimistic faith in a glorious future for commercial fruit farming in the Okanagan Valley.

The Aberdeens arrived at Guisachan, named after the Inverness-shire estate belonging to Lady Aberdeen's family, the Marjoribanks, following a four-hour boat trip down Lake Okanagan from Vernon. Ishbel noted in her journal that "[after landing] we all walked on the two miles to Guisachan and took possession of our new domain by moonlight."⁴ They were pleasantly surprised to find that while they had expected "a flat plain with bare hills in the distance, and a few trees and bushes and a house set down in the middle of the flat," they found themselves instead "in the midst of hills looking more like Guisachan hills than any others that we have seen in Canada."⁵ Years later, their daughter Marjorie, who had accompanied them, recalled that her parents "hurried like gleeful children, along with myself, aged ten, to see their very own play-house; Guisachan, B.C."⁶

It seems likely that Marjorie, drawing on memories from nearly sixty years earlier, conflated her 1891 visit to Guisachan with her parents' Christmas gift that same year of a "holiday cottage," complete with garden, on the Haddo estate in Scotland.⁷ Still, the suggestion that Guisachan was a playhouse is intriguing, especially when set in dialogue with the several dozen Kodak photographs that Lady Aberdeen took during the course of their stay. Although Marjorie did not reveal what she meant by calling it a "play-house" – whether a theatre or "a toy house for children to play in"⁸ – I engage with the idea that, for the Aberdeens, Guisachan served as both. By linking the new home-away-from-home to the childhood place where she and her siblings had spent a significant portion of each year, Ishbel created the idea that the second Guisachan was like a toy house set in a garden, but in this case a colonial one; far from the parental home and paternal gaze, it was a place where family rituals could be explored in a more neutral setting. At the same time, the property also strayed into the second meaning of playhouse, in that Guisachan, BC, was very much like a theatre set for the staging of these rituals.

The Kodak photographs that are the focus of this paper were taken back to Britain where they were sorted and labelled and placed in various family albums for the consumption of future generations of both the Aberdeens and the Marjoribanks. In some cases, there are several copies of particular photographs and they appear in different albums. In 1893, Lady Aberdeen included twenty-one of them plus one watercolour in the two chapters devoted to the Guisachan Farm, as they called it, in *Through Canada with a Kodak*, the public – and published – account of the Aberdeens' 1890 and 1891 cross-Canada trips; within the book, (hereafter *Through Canada*), the role of the images was primarily to provide visual anchors for Lady Aberdeen's enthusiastic narrative.⁹ As discrete entities in their own right, the photographs have received little scholarly attention.¹⁰ Lady Aberdeen was an

amateur photographer and as many of the photographs in the album reveal, she struggled with the technical challenges of early Kodak photography. Her difficulty in controlling light, particularly its seeping in at the edges, is clearly visible in some of the Kodaks. *The Guisachan Album* has always been kept in the family home whose close proximity to the North Sea has resulted in some foxing of the photographs themselves and of the paper they are mounted on.

In this paper, I argue that a close reading of the Guisachan snapshots assembled by Lady Aberdeen in an album entitled *Kodak Snaps by IA [Ishbel Aberdeen] at Guisachan BC 1891 and some large views of Coldstream Ranch Vernon BC* (hereafter *The Guisachan Album*)¹¹ reveals information about the Aberdeens' first colonizing venture in the Okanagan Valley that is not disclosed in the two chapters on Guisachan in *Through Canada*. In the book, Ishbel offers a brisk and buoyant chronicle of the holiday, noting events, people, and details of the house and farm, interlaced with observations on the price of hired labour, future plans for growing fruit, and thoughts on "what class of settlers are likely to succeed in this part of British Columbia."¹² As opposed to this travel narrative aimed at the general public, the photographs, many of them not included in *Through Canada*, contain a personal, private narrative about family relationships that was not intended for public consumption. My discussion singles out those photographs that frame Guisachan Farm as a site where carefully chosen snippets of recent Marjoribanks family history could be re-envisioned and inscribed on the newly acquired land. As historian of photography Val Williams points out, "photography gave [aristocratic women] the opportunity both to identify a personal history of their own families and to place those families precisely within a certain schema. A family, once photographed, assumes a particular reality, fixed in time by its portrayer, solid against a portico or a stone balustrade, its class and its preoccupations firmly established."¹³ Following Rosalind Krauss's comments on family photography, I contend that in Lady Aberdeen's hands, the camera was "a projective tool, part of the theatre that [she constructed] to convince [herself] that the family was together and whole."¹⁴

The Aberdeens' decision to visit Canada in the autumn of 1890 is framed by Ishbel in the opening paragraph of *Through Canada* as a matter of "our desires, coupled with doctor's advice."¹⁵ She gingerly sidesteps mention of the nervous breakdown she had suffered in late 1889 and avoids any suggestion that there might have been an ulterior motive to their visit. There were other benefits besides health ones to the Canadian sojourn; as historian Marjory Harper notes, such a trip would "at least remove her from the cauldron of Liberal politics at home" and at the same time allow the philanthropic Lady Aberdeen to investigate emigration possibilities as a "solution to

socio-economic problems in Britain.”¹⁶ However, despite these compelling reasons, the crucial determining factor underlying the Aberdeens’ trip to Canada was Ishbel’s personal commitment to establishing the elder of her two younger remittance-men brothers, Coutts Marjoribanks (1860–1924), within reach of both Empire and the Presbyterian Church.¹⁷ Coutts had been managing his father’s cattle ranch in North Dakota and, by 1890, it was evident that the ranch was failing. With increasing concern within the Marjoribanks family over Coutts’s managerial abilities, it was hardly a coincidence that the Aberdeens decided to visit Canada at this point. In my view, the purchase of the Guisachan farm in October 1890, following a meeting with Coutts in Winnipeg, and his subsequent relocation to British Columbia in late 1890, was a carefully orchestrated attempt by Lady Aberdeen to re-script the biography-to-date of the brother whom she fondly called “Couttsy.” The Guisachan farm, two hundred acres of which would be used for commercial fruit-growing with the rest used for mixed-farming,¹⁸ would provide the ideal site for rehabilitating Coutts and his fortunes, and *The Guisachan Album*, compiled by Ishbel for the family, would offer documentary evidence of the success of this endeavour. However, reading *The Guisachan Album* over a century after it was compiled is complicated not only by the fact that, as Nancy Martha West has pointed out, “family photography does not seek to be understood by all,”¹⁹ but also by the fact that we know relatively little about Coutts Marjoribanks; he is a shadowy figure, only partly illuminated through biographical fragments and scattered anecdotes. Thus, if *The Guisachan Album* is to be read as a document that attempts to restore Coutts’s reputation within the family, some piecing together of these biographical fragments and untangling the strands that link him to his sister Ishbel in the years around 1890 is needed. Interrogating this album and Coutts’s centrality within it “underscore[s] the point,” as Martha Langford writes in her study of photographic albums, “that [an] album is only a fragment of a larger family history, definitive (if at all) temporarily.”²⁰

Coutts Marjoribanks was three years younger than Ishbel and the closest in age of her siblings. He was the third (and second surviving) son of Dudley Coutts Marjoribanks who became the first Baron Tweedmouth in 1881.²¹ He was educated at Harrow, served as a lieutenant in the Queen’s Own Cameron Highlanders, and then, at the age of twenty-four or twenty-five, was sent to manage his father’s ranch in Towner, North Dakota.²² Possibly his father thought both he and his younger brother Archie, who was sent to manage a ranch in Texas, were suited to this type of work, since Aberdeen Angus cattle were raised on the Guisachan estate in the Highlands. Coutts moved to North Dakota in late 1884 or early 1885 with substantial start-up capital and an annual allowance provided by his father, and by October of 1889 had

amassed nearly 1,000 acres.²³ When the Aberdeens visited him in July 1887, Ishbel wrote in her journal that she felt “quite a pang to find how much of an American and of a ranchman he’d become,” and she lamented the fact that her brother, whom she described as “a good straightforward old thing,” had taken steps to become an American citizen.²⁴

It is during this 1887 visit, I suggest, that one finds the seeds of the plan to relocate Coutts somewhere within the embrace of Empire and Church. Having noted that her brother was adapting to life in the American West, Lady Aberdeen then sets out a major concern: she is uneasy about the impact of American frontier culture on the spiritual and moral life of her twenty-seven-year-old bachelor brother. She writes that Coutts had gone to church service with them twice on 3 July “but we were not successful in our churches – this morning the Episcopal one was horrid.” She then notes that:

We have not yet hit upon much religious life in America – I suppose because we do not know where to find it – but there seems such whole-sale indifference, such unconsciousness of the v. meaning of truth, honesty, honour. Anything to make money. As my brother says, if there is no money to be made by any given pursuit it will not be looked at. No game or anything is ever played at except as a means of winning money.²⁵

The “steady significance of faith,”²⁶ as Veronica Strong-Boag calls it, defined the Aberdeens individually and as a couple. Ishbel’s observation on the dearth of religious life in North Dakota was not simply an unvarnished comment on her part; rather I suggest that she was under no illusion as to Coutts’s potential to lapse into what she deemed an irresponsible and immoral lifestyle, a concern that is supported by anecdotal accounts of Coutts’s drinking and carousing in the saloons of North Dakota.²⁷ Within two years of the Aberdeens’ visit, Coutts’s ranch was failing amid accusations by his father that he was living too extravagant a lifestyle and neglecting his ranching duties. Despite receiving a shipment of Aberdeen Angus cattle from the Guisachan estate in Scotland, sent by his mother,²⁸ by early 1889, as historian Larry McFarlane has noted, Coutts was clearly in trouble, as were many ranchers: he was attempting to sell his cattle at low prices in a depressed market while at the same time, and despite this, enlarging his house and building more fences in early 1890.²⁹ Anecdotal accounts suggest that he lost some of his herd to cattle rustling by people he knew; if so, this added further misery.³⁰

The Aberdeens knew about Coutts’s accumulating financial woes in the late 1880s. Marjorie Pentland quotes from a letter Ishbel received from her

mother around this time in which Lady Tweedmouth writes “Coutts poor boy has had ill luck with his farming: papa very angry,”³¹ and one can speculate that there must have been other letters along the same lines. The Aberdeens’ response was to visit Canada, under the official guise of doctors’ orders, and initiate plans to relocate Coutts.

By early October 1890 the Aberdeens had reached Winnipeg, where they met up with Coutts whom they had not seen for three years. Ishbel’s journal provides the only firsthand account we have of this meeting (*Through Canada* records only that her brother met them there).³² She offers a warmly enthusiastic description of Coutts’s arrival and a factual assessment of the situation he was facing in North Dakota. “Tonight Couttsy rejoiced our hearts by turning up from Dakota, leaving about 4 this morning and arriving at 6,” she wrote in her entry for 3 October. She then offers a sympathetic account of the troubles on the American ranch, writing that:

He has had a bad time of it lately between droughts and loss of stock generally – he has 1260 acres now, has enlarged his house and his barn, built two miles of fence and so on but what good if the rivers dry up and nothing will grow. He fancies sheep might do.

The solution is clear:

We are going to get Mr. Clay to report on the profitability of selling the place wh [sic] Coutts thinks will be cheap at 20,000 dollars and then try to get Coutts over into Canada into some more civilized part, probably Brit. Columbia.³³

She adds that Coutts’s “many misfortunes of late” can be attributed to “his neighbours [who] are not pleasant people to associate with, even in business relations, and everything is mortgaged.”³⁴

Plans to relocate Coutts moved quickly. Eleven days later, on 14 October, the Aberdeens, by now in Vancouver, met up with George Grant Mackay, whom Lady Aberdeen described as “an old friend who engineered the Guisachan roads for my father, did many other jobs for him in the way of buying and selling.”³⁵ Mackay, who had relocated from his native Inverness to Vancouver two years earlier, was active – and very successful – in property dealings in both Vancouver and the Okanagan; following a “prolonged lunch” with the mayor and his wife, the Aberdeens “started forth on [their] real business with Mr. Mackay i.e. to see some farms which might possibly do for Couttsy.”³⁶ Finding property in the vicinity of Vancouver too expensive, the Aberdeens settled on a farm “now belonging to a half-breed, 480 acres

with a nice house, some 70 head of cattle, horses, wheat, implements, etc., wh. [sic] Mr. Mackay was thinking of buying on his own account for 10,000 dollars a short time back.”³⁷ This property in the Mission Valley belonging to John McDougall, once purchased, was immediately renamed Guisachan, thus underlining Ishbel’s centrality in orchestrating the purchase. Mackay, having secured a major sale to a Scottish earl, immediately embarked on plans to develop a town directly to the east of Guisachan, which he named Benvoulin in honour of his own Highland background. By late 1890, Coutts had left North Dakota, and was settled at Guisachan. The business arrangement, outlined in Ishbel’s journal, was that Coutts would work for two years without pay and that the salary he would have had would then be put into the farm; at that point he would become a partner with Lord Aberdeen and the two would divide the profits.³⁸ Ishbel mused that “It would be nice to see poor old Coutts a rich man after all!”³⁹

Much of the preceding discussion has drawn on Lady Aberdeen’s private journals for an account of events as they unfolded; if there were letters or diaries by either Coutts or Mackay chronicling the same events, they have disappeared. But Ishbel was an inveterate scribbler, and the journal from this first trip, as well as the next one in 1891, offers valuable glimpses of the embryonic transformation of the Okanagan Valley from ranching to mixed farming and orcharding during this time. These journals, as they are usually called in the literature on the Aberdeens (and in this paper I follow this convention), were actually a series of letters written on Ishbel’s personal notepaper and sent back to Britain to be circulated among family and friends. At some point they were assembled and then bound with a cover, possibly by Marjorie, who was the keeper of her mother’s voluminous papers and correspondence and ultimate arbiter of their fate.⁴⁰ As theorist Sara Mills has noted, in the genre of travel writing it is “assumed that travellers send letters to their friends and relatives whilst they travel, which they have published when they return ... Many of the letters which form travel books were scrupulously written with a view to publication.”⁴¹ This was so with Lady Aberdeen: carefully chosen selections from the journals, some of whose pages are covered in blue-penciled editorial and pagination markings, appeared as short articles first of all in serial form in the Haddo House estate magazine, *Onward and Upward*, which started publication in 1891, and then appeared, without further editing, in *Through Canada*.⁴² However, it is the unabridged sections of the journals, some of them unpublished, which command attention here. In my opinion, these journals – and especially those sections that describe the purchase of land in the Okanagan Valley in 1890 and the Aberdeens’ first visit in 1891 – should be read as carefully constructed narratives, written to justify the purchase of the McDougall property and to

deflect the anticipated patriarchal disapproval of Dudley Coutts Marjoribanks who, as noted, was already angry with Coutts over the failure of the North Dakota ranch and whose capricious wrath could easily swing in their direction.⁴³

Criticism of the Guisachan purchase by Dudley Coutts Marjoribanks was not long in coming. It is likely that Ishbel either sent him a letter under separate cover or that he read one of the letters that was meant to circulate among family and friends in which she enthusiastically described the area. As her journal reveals, Mackay was a consummate salesman; he had deftly touched on alliances, relationships, and shared outlooks to persuade the Aberdeens to buy in the Mission Valley. In his carefully calibrated pitch, he painted a picture of a corner of the Empire that had already been domesticated by people from within their own social stratum in Britain, casually dropping Lord Lorne's aesthetic judgments of the landscape and Lord Elphinstone's sporting proclivities into the sales patter. The district "is now in the process of being opened up by a railway going south of the C.P.R. to Long Lake which Lord Lorne describes as the loveliest lake in Canada," Lady Aberdeen gushed, and "the place besides being on a lake is on a plateau surrounded by hills where the most splendid sport can be had." Indeed, "Lord Elphinstone [and] some other English gentlemen have bought a fishing place thereabouts."⁴⁴ In his reply, Marjoribanks senior, not as sympathetic to Coutts as Ishbel was, wrote that he hoped that "the Aberdeen Plot for Coutts would work without loss to the kind Plotters" and then went on to say, with respect to the land itself, that:

My calculations will not allow me to think that its size will admit of the Capacities you mention. As for the good times you speak of, if they came your way you would be the first people to lay down a double line of railway at your own expense. Well, as usual you are head over ears in business of your own manufacturing.⁴⁵

Ishbel clearly had her work cut out for her if she wished to persuade her father of the viability of the new enterprise.

The Guisachan Album is unusual among the albums in the Aberdeen family collection in that it has a plain dark leather cover with no embossed gold lettering; instead there is a small handwritten note on yellow paper, with the descriptive title referred to earlier, glued to the front cover. The album is slender; it measures 24.5 × 31 cm and contains a mere thirty-four pages. Within it, the arrangement of the photographs loosely follows the chronology set out in Ishbel's journal and in *Through Canada* but the main organizational impulse is thematic: hunting scenes are grouped together, views of the

house are seen on the same page and, when necessary for thematic unity, chronological sequencing is abandoned. There is a clear visual narrative with a beginning, middle, and end. The album opens with three photographs of the Aberdeens' arrival by train at Vernon on the soon-to-be completed Shuswap and Okanagan Railway, a CPR branch line from Sicamous to Vernon. Lord Aberdeen, a railway enthusiast, hired a special chartered train and thus was responsible for the first passenger train on the new line. These photos and the next six, of the boat trip down the lake and their arrival at the gates of Guisachan, visually set the stage for the middle section of the narrative which contains the majority of the photos, and which concentrates on daily life at the new farm, showing family activities, details of the farm buildings, including the house, and offering a general impression of what Guisachan Farm looked like. The closing section shows the family sitting on the boat as they retrace their steps north to Vernon to catch the train. The Guisachan idyll has come to an end, captured in a series of photos of the Aberdeens' sad faces and views of Okanagan Lake as the boat draws further and further away from Guisachan. Short captions placed under each photo describe each scene and very occasionally give some idea of the emotional tenor of the visit, and lines, drawn in ink with a straight edge, both separate and join the photos. There are several blank pages interspersed throughout the album, suggesting that Ishbel left them blank in anticipation that other photos relating to the adjacent pages might be found. It is a scrap album, a type that, Andrea Kunard has noted, "is more interactive in terms of its presentation of imagery."⁴⁶

The Guisachan Album was assembled at some point after the Aberdeens' 1891 visit to Guisachan, and possibly as late as November 1892. In addition to the 1891 Kodaks taken by Lady Aberdeen, there are twenty-six large photos by William Hanson Bourne of Calgary, who visited the Okanagan a year later, in November 1892, to photograph Guisachan and the Aberdeens' second Okanagan property, the Coldstream Ranch.⁴⁷ The decision to purchase the 13,261-acre ranch in Vernon at the end of their time at Guisachan and while they were still in British Columbia reflects the buoyant optimism the Aberdeens felt about the Okanagan Valley: Ishbel notes in her journal that her husband was "enthusiastic about the prospects of this country" and "determined to go in for it somehow."⁴⁸ In *Through Canada* she records the bounty of a neighbour's apple trees at Guisachan and presciently observes that "Such facts, and the knowledge of the ever-increasing demand for fruit of all kinds in the North-West provinces, will doubtless cause the valley to become ere long a great fruit-producing centre."⁴⁹ As Marjory Harper writes, "Mackay [who was the agent in the Coldstream transaction as well as the person who facilitated the purchase of Guisachan] persuaded Lord Aberdeen of the benefit he would confer on the district – and indeed the whole

province – if he would buy Coldstream and break up a large proportion of its 13,261 acres into compact lots for fruit growers.”⁵⁰ Despite purchasing the ranch in 1891, the Aberdeens did not visit it until 1894, a year into their tenure in Ottawa. Ishbel took a number of photographs on both their 1894 and 1895 visits, however these photographs are scattered throughout various albums and there is no Coldstream album comparable to the Guisachan one. Within *The Guisachan Album*, the nine Bourne photos devoted to Guisachan are interspersed with Ishbel’s Kodaks but the remaining seventeen, devoted to the Coldstream Ranch and Vernon and the north end of the Okanagan Valley, though not part of the Guisachan narrative and thus beyond the scope of this paper, play an important role in the album. Grouped together at the end of the album, they provide an epilogue to the Guisachan narrative, testimony to the Aberdeens’ euphoria and high hopes for their second Okanagan business venture. These Bourne photos have captions but there is no mention of his name in *The Guisachan Album*.

My discussion of *The Guisachan Album* centres on two thematic groupings within it: I look first at a group of Kodaks that focuses on the house and farm itself, photos that underscore Coutts’s centrality to the enterprise; I then consider three groups of photographs that position him within the heart of the family, participating in various activities with his sister, niece, and brother-in-law. I begin my discussion, however, with a photo that Lady Aberdeen chose not to include in *Through Canada*, likely because it was taken by someone else. Captioned “Kodaking and being Kodaked at Guisachan B.C.” (Fig. 1), it appears early in the album grouped with seven photos of the house on facing pages. It is, in many ways, the conceptual anchor of *The Guisachan Album*; the photographer, likely Marjorie, has caught Ishbel in the act of taking the Kodaks that shape a poignant vision of sought-after family cohesion during the ten days at Guisachan in 1891. With few exceptions, notably the photographs by Bourne and a few Kodaks where someone else has taken the camera so that Ishbel could be included, the photos in the album were taken by Lady Aberdeen. In this photo, she is seen, bent over her tripod and camera, taking a close-up of the exterior of the new house, a slim corner of the verandah just visible to the right. As well as establishing Ishbel’s authorship of the photographic narrative, this photo can be read as laying claim to the land, so recently in her journal purchased from the previous owner whom she dismisses as “a half-breed.” As Catherine Hall notes, “for settlers to possess the lands which they fondly constructed as ‘vacant’ they need to map them, to name them in their own language . . . to represent them visually, to civilize and cure them.”⁵¹

In this vein, one of Coutts Marjoribanks’s first self-appointed tasks had been to build a new house at Guisachan to replace the smaller one which he rejected as inadequate; this new house, plans of which he sent to Lord



Kodaking and being Kodaked at Guisachan B.C.

1 | Ishbel Aberdeen, "Kodaking and being Kodaked at Guisachan B.C.," 1891, Kodak photograph from *The Guisachan Album*, private archives owned by the current Lord Aberdeen. (Photo: Courtesy of Lord Aberdeen)

Aberdeen for approval,⁵² was quite different from the house he had built in North Dakota, and possibly drew its inspiration from one of the pre-fab bungalow-style shooting lodges being sold in Britain during the late nineteenth century.⁵³ It signified new ownership and management, and the imposition of social order on land that until recently had been owned by the McDougalls, who had pre-empted it in 1860.⁵⁴ The house was described by W.D. (William Dalgleish) Hobson, a recent English immigrant, as “very large for this country . . . [and] quite luxurious compared with the shack and hotel life in Vernon.”⁵⁵ By the time the Aberdeens arrived in 1891, construction was complete, and the new house received Ishbel’s warm approval. In her journal, she described the skill with which her brother had decorated it, noting especially the “sort of gold Japanese paper” used in the hall and recording the number of bedrooms, the office, kitchen, large sitting room, and dining room. The “verandah running right round the house” pleased her, and she enthused that “It is just perfect and everything is delightful.”⁵⁶

Lady Aberdeen took several photos of the exterior of the house, and also attempted a photo of the entrance hall: unfortunately the photo is so dark that one cannot see the “horns and heads of deer shot in Dakota by my brother.”⁵⁷ What her photos do not show (and something she may have been unaware of) was that the house had no insulation and that only a thin layer of the gold “Japanese paper” covered the chicken netting over the frame, thus rendering the seven fireplaces impotent in the face of the Okanagan winters.

While it is easy in retrospect to see the problems surrounding the construction of the house as warning signs of Coutts’s incompetence, it was not apparent to Lady Aberdeen in the balmy late autumn of 1891. What she did notice, however, and what appears as the first sign of her doubt in what her father called “the Aberdeen Plot for Coutts,” was that the third house on the property (the new house was the fourth) was “a really good house” and that “It is really a better house than either of my brothers had at their other places, though Mr. Smith thinks it a poor place.”⁵⁸ She described the layout and size of the third house and noted that it had been recently painted. Her doubt crystallized around concerns about what their Edinburgh lawyer might think of the expenditure on Coutts’s bungalow. In her journal she wrote: “It is as well that Mr. Jamieson did not see it, for he would have suggested that there was no need to build a new house on the present scale.”⁵⁹ However, Mr. Jamieson did see it the following year, in November of 1892, when he came to assess the financial stability of the Aberdeens’ two Okanagan ventures, and he was blunt about what he thought. His comments were pithy and to the point:

The house is a pretty one and contrasts, of course, very favourably with those in the vicinity, but I was informed, and my own



2 | Ishbel Aberdeen, *Guisachan, B.C. October 1891 [Lord Aberdeen's Farm]*, 1891, watercolour on paper, 14 × 34.2 cm, Library and Archives Canada/Lady Pentland collection/C-004544. (Photo: Library and Archives Canada)

observations confirmed the information, that it is badly finished. No architect acquainted with the style of building and the habits of the country was employed – the thick paper generally used for partitions for warmth and deafening was not, I understand, provided – no tenders were invited from Tradesmen – two brothers, local tradesmen, very “decent” men, were simply employed – and I was told that when part of the work was found indifferent they were paid extra for restoring their own imperfect work.⁶⁰

A comparison between a watercolour sketch and a photograph, both done by Lady Aberdeen, likely at the same time and certainly in the same location, offers a useful glimpse of the disjuncture between what she saw as a painter and what she saw as a photographer. The watercolour, not included in *Through Canada*, is simply labelled “Guisachan B.C. October 1891” (Fig. 2). In it, the farm is subordinated to Lady Aberdeen’s aesthetic colonizing gaze: she focuses on the house, seen slightly to the left of centre and raised on a platform above the flat land. To the right is the house that Coutts rejected;



3 | Ishbel Aberdeen, “Guisachan, B.C.,” 1891. Kodak photograph from *The Guisachan Album*, private archives owned by the current Lord Aberdeen. (Photo: Courtesy of Lord Aberdeen)

however, most of her attention is on the hills in the background which reminded her so much of the hills around the Scottish Guisachan. There is little to tie this view to the Okanagan except the title and, if one is familiar with it, the topography; even the house is a transplant from one colony to another. This watercolour of Guisachan is essentially a painting of a country estate, done in keeping with what scholar Malcolm Andrews has referred to as the picturesque’s “homogenizing habit [that] dulls with sameness and familiarity.”⁶¹ The broad sweeps of paint throughout the foreground occlude the fact that this is land in transition, one of the early salvos in a wholesale agricultural transformation of the Okanagan.

The almost identical Kodak looks rawer, less inviting (Fig. 3). Here the foreground is bumpy and irregular, possibly the result of the recent hay

mowing or ploughing, and it looks rather like the “flat plain with bare hills in the distance” that Lady Aberdeen feared she would find. In the photo, the hills in the background are barely visible and it is the house that commands attention. While the watercolour creates an image of Guisachan as a place of possibility in a welcoming geography, the photo – grittier and more subdued – gets at something different. The magnitude of the task that the Aberdeens expected Coutts to take on – i.e. to transform this land into a successful orchard and mixed farming enterprise that would bring fellow settler capitalists – was enormous. Neither the Aberdeens nor Coutts knew much about the economic realities of large-scale intensive fruit farming with its attendant issues of irrigation, transportation, and distribution, although few others in the semi-arid Valley did either at this juncture: the capital-intensive development of orchards did not arrive in the Okanagan until the early twentieth century.⁶² Despite this, *The Guisachan Album* suggests that the Coutts-led transformation of what had been grazing land for cattle and horses is well underway, with Kodaks of haystacks, lumber, lettuce, chicken, and pigs (Fig. 4).

Lady Aberdeen’s warm support for her brother’s management skills extended to her approval of his choice of men to work the farm. In *Through Canada* she wrote that “We were fortunate in securing a very nice set of men and I am sorry our Kodak has not done them more justice . . . one would be from Ontario, another from Yorkshire, another from the States.”⁶³ Nevertheless, she included a photo from the album entitled “Employer’s [*sic*] and Employed at Guisachan B.C.,” but in *Through Canada* labelled it instead “The Guisachan Staff” (Fig. 5). The international workforce that Coutts had assembled stands and sits on the porch at the back of the house, subject to her gaze. Lord Aberdeen sits while Coutts stands to the right. I read this photo and its original label referring to employers in the plural as once again reflecting Lady Aberdeen’s support for her brother by legitimizing his role in the management of Guisachan. But there is something else in this photograph.

To our eyes, Guisachan was clearly a homosocial milieu, as were so many frontier communities in Canada and elsewhere, and as historian Adele Perry has pointed out, “drink was the most significant, traditionally all-male pursuit, and that backwoods men were ardent drinkers was a standard part of social commentary.”⁶⁴ Lady Aberdeen may have been pleased with the team Coutts had assembled, but as she confided to her journal, the nearby presence of “the ‘hotel’ and store” of their neighbour Lequime was “a centre of mischief unhappily to the neighbourhood.”⁶⁵ She noted, “It is the custom to repair to this store every Sunday after church and then to sit and drink all afternoon, evening and night, making a frightful row and disturbance.”⁶⁶ She further



4 | Ishbel Aberdeen, “White Leghorns at Guisachan B.C.”; “Guisachan Pigs”; “Specimen of a Guisachan Cabbage”; “Guisachan,” 1891. Kodak photograph from *The Guisachan Album*, private archives owned by the current Lord Aberdeen. (Photo: Courtesy of Lord Aberdeen)

noted that the men frequently drank away not only the week’s wages but that “5 small ranches have passed into Lequime’s hands in order to pay drink accounts.”⁶⁷ Although she does not say so explicitly there were few signs of Empire in the Mission Valley in 1891 other than Guisachan house. Mackay’s nascent community of Benvoulin, which included the farm, was mostly male, and there was no Presbyterian church; services were held in the schoolhouse with an itinerant minister coming down from Vernon, and the congregation counted very few women. It was still very much a frontier and probably much more like North Dakota than Lady Aberdeen had wished.



5 | Ishbel Aberdeen, "Employer's [sic] & Employed at Guisachan B.C.," 1891. Kodak photograph from *The Guisachan Album*, private archives owned by the current Lord Aberdeen. (Photo: Courtesy of Lord Aberdeen)

That there was no Presbyterian church must have come as a shock to the Aberdeens who had been assured by the wily Mackay that there was one in the Mission Valley. Lady Aberdeen's journal prior to her visit is unequivocal on this point: "There is a Presbyterian church, and an R.C. one, so that it will be v. different from the wilds of Dakota."⁶⁸ She later made no comment on Mackay's broken promise but she was very clear on the need for a church, writing in *Through Canada* that, "If settlers are allowed to get into a habit of not attending church . . . many opportunities for promoting religious influences, and for preventing evil will have been lost."⁶⁹ A visit from Paul Langill, the itinerant Presbyterian minister from Vernon two days after they arrived offered Ishbel the chance to avert spiritual disaster for Coutts. Lord

Aberdeen promised \$400 towards the estimated \$1,000 it would cost to build a church at Benvoulin on land that had recently been offered for that purpose by Mackay.⁷⁰ The church, named Bethel Presbyterian, was completed nearly a year later and was formally dedicated on 11 September 1892.⁷¹ The Aberdeens did not see it until their next visit to Guisachan in 1894, and the following year Ishbel described it in her journal as “the pretty little church at Benvoulin which H.E. [His Excellency] helped to build.”⁷²

That Coutts Marjoribanks was now bracketed by both Empire, as represented by the colonial bungalow and the surrounding land awaiting cultivation, and Church, which had been notably absent in North Dakota but was now symbolized by his brother-in-law’s donation towards construction of one, is clear in a Kodak entitled “Coming home from Church” (Fig. 6). In this photo, which was not included in *Through Canada*, Coutts is shown perched atop the farm wagon in the company of his sister and brother-in-law, in front of the balustraded front verandah of Guisachan. Marjorie must have taken the photo, as Lady Aberdeen is in it, seated alongside Eustace Smith, the farm manager. The Kodak serves as a record of Coutts’s participation in the family religious rituals but of course offers no proof that this was more than a token gesture; nevertheless, in Ishbel’s eyes, the support was there in a way that it had not been in North Dakota. She noted approvingly that Coutts and Smith were going to try to organize Sunday prayers for the workers and “anybody else who may care to come,” but then wrote, “Curiously enough, Coutts seemed to assent more heartily to the proposal than Mr. Eustace Smith.”⁷³ It is a stray comment, again suggesting that she is all too aware of the temptations to which Coutts might succumb, and the likelihood that his religious convictions were less resolute than hers. There are no Kodaks of the nearby temptations.

A number of photographs position Coutts firmly within the heart of the family, underlining his position as brother, brother-in-law, and uncle: he is seen riding across the farm, both alone and in the company of Lord Aberdeen and Marjorie, and heading out to hunt bear with Lord Aberdeen (amusingly, Lady Aberdeen noted in her journal that neither Coutts nor Eustace Smith had been to a bear hunt before “partly because they have been so busy watching the house and its builders”⁷⁴). But three sets of photographs are particularly important to my argument that Guisachan was a site where carefully chosen snippets of Marjoribanks family recent history could be re-envisioned and inscribed on the newly acquired land. The first set consists of two photos in *The Guisachan Album* that show the Aberdeens, with Marjorie and Coutts, planting fir trees that they have brought from the Scottish Guisachan (they did not flourish and so a similar ritual was re-enacted on their 1894 visit). For the London-born Lady



6 | Ishbel Aberdeen, “Coming home from Church with the new team Brown Bess & Baby & her foal Madge Guisachan B.C.,” 1891. Kodak photograph from *The Guisachan Album*, private archives owned by the current Lord Aberdeen. (Photo: Courtesy of Lord Aberdeen)

Aberdeen, a passionate follower of the “cult of the Highlands,”⁷⁵ the fact that her name – Ishbel – and that of the family summer home were Gaelic held deep significance (Guisachan means “place of the firs”). In the two Kodaks documenting this imperialist gesture, Coutts, whose home is now the new Guisachan, is present and seems to be watching the planting with mild interest; however, it is Lord Aberdeen who is down on hands and knees planting, not Coutts (Fig. 7).

The second set of photos under consideration shows the family gathered on the verandah of the house after a hunt. Using the carved woodwork as a pictorial frame, Lady Aberdeen (positioned both behind and in front of the



7 | Ishbel Aberdeen, “The Guisachan N.B. Scotch Firs being Planted at Guisachan B.C.” Kodak photograph from *The Guisachan Album*, private archives owned by the current Lord Aberdeen. (Photo: Courtesy of Lord Aberdeen)

lens) and no stranger to photographic studios, works within well-established conventions of hunting party photographs. In one that I find particularly interesting (Fig. 8), she carefully poses her family in a triangle within the cube of the space, revealing through its careful hierarchical structuring the dynamics of familial power at Guisachan. Reading from the lower part of the photo, we see Marjorie sitting on the steps, reinforcing her position as “the child”; but it is Coutts’s glance towards Lord Aberdeen that is particularly noteworthy. Coutts has turned away to place his gun against the wall of the house but looks back across his left shoulder at Lord Aberdeen who is casually leaning against the porch’s post. It is impossible to see either Lord Aberdeen’s or Marjorie’s eyes but Coutts, caught in the moment, looks at his brother-



8 | Ishbel Aberdeen, “Aberdeen Coutts & Marjorie guarding the game aided by ‘Spot’ & ‘Crusoe,’” 1891. Kodak photograph from *The Guisachan Album*, private archives owned by the current Lord Aberdeen. (Photo: Courtesy of Lord Aberdeen)

in-law – he is not friendly nor is he hostile, but he is wary and appraising. The focus is on the two brothers-in-law, whose lives by now were deeply entwined, but it is a relationship of unequal power; Coutts, thirty-one years old, has traded the patriarchal control of his father, Lord Tweedmouth, for that of Lord Aberdeen.

The third set of photos under consideration documents the Aberdeens’ departure from Guisachan after nine days. In her journal, Ishbel wrote, “tomorrow we must say good-bye to this delightful place, where we have enjoyed a more real holiday that [*sic*] we have ever had before.”⁷⁶ Some of the captions on the series of photos devoted to the departure and the boat ride back up the lake reveal Ishbel’s sorrow at leaving: for example, “S.S.



9 | Ishbel Aberdeen, “Uncle & Niece on boat.” Kodak photograph from *The Guisachan Album*, private archives owned by the current Lord Aberdeen. (Photo: Courtesy of Lord Aberdeen)

Penticton on Okenagan [sic] Lake waiting to bear away unwilling freight from Guisachan B.C.” and “Resignation to departure.” A photo, simply entitled “Departure” shows her, eyes downcast, as the boat pulls away from the dock. But it is the Kodak entitled “Uncle & Niece on boat” that is most compelling (Fig. 9). Here, Marjorie is seen in animated conversation with Coutts who is standing with his back to the camera looking at the seated Marjorie as the boat slips past the Guisachan-like hills that so enthralled the Aberdeens. It is the most relaxed and familial of all the Kodaks in *The Guisachan Album*,

the one that most clearly speaks to Coutts's reintegration into the family. Marjorie, who was only three years old – four, at the most – when Coutts left England for North Dakota, has, over the course of the visit to Guisachan, established her own relationship to her uncle and, as her account of the visit suggests, if there were tensions, they were not visible to a ten-year-old child.

This photo is, in my opinion, the emblematic photo of the “Coutts project” that is documented in *The Guisachan Album*. Despite the careful visual scripting of a family holiday, Coutts – the focus of the Guisachan venture – remains an enigma. We see his back, his feet widely planted and hands in pocket, and a bit of his head that is not covered by his hat. But we do not see his face or his eyes, and his thoughts about his new life remain concealed from the viewer. We know, thanks to Ishbel's journal, that he is on his way to Agassiz to meet with a government specialist about growing fruit trees; for her part, Lady Aberdeen is fretting about what Mr. Jamieson, the Edinburgh lawyer, is going to think about their purchase of the 13,000-acre Coldstream Ranch (“Will not Mr. Jamieson's hair stand on end,” she wrote⁷⁷). Within a year the Aberdeens decided to place Coutts as manager of the Vernon property, effectively removing him as the estate manager of Guisachan. His time at the Coldstream Ranch was also brief; when his father died in 1894, he gave up managing it and went back to Scotland for an extended stay. This is, therefore, as far as is known, the last photograph taken by Ishbel of Coutts in the Okanagan; when they next visited in 1894, he was gone.

In her book, *Family Frames*, Marianne Hirsch has written of “the space of contradiction between the myth of the ideal family and the lived reality of family life.”⁷⁸ It is precisely this contradiction that underscores Lady Aberdeen's photographs of the family at Guisachan. I have argued that Lady Aberdeen sought to reintegrate her brother into the family after his troubled years in North Dakota, using her camera as a tool to convince herself and others of the success of this private family project. Some of the photos – those that show the family's recreational activities – support this. However, the reality of Guisachan was in some ways quite different from what Lady Aberdeen had imagined when first presented with a salesman's sharp promotional pitch. As a close reading of the photographic record suggests, the Aberdeens made a number of blithe assumptions about Coutts's ability to translate cattle ranching into orcharding and mixed farming. That these assumptions would soon become problematic is apparent in the photographs of both the roughly cultivated land at Guisachan and of the team that Coutts had brought together: these men were dressed as cowboys, and their recent background, like his, was ranching, not orcharding. As the astute Mr. Jamieson wrote of Coutts in 1892, “Guisachan . . . was in no respect suitable

for him: it could never be a cattle ranch, Mr. Marjoribanks was not the man to sit down to cultivate apples and pears or hops.”⁷⁹

Lady Aberdeen’s photographs can be interpreted in multiple ways but in concluding I will emphasize three points. The first is that the Aberdeens were only at Guisachan for a short time and therefore any notion that the photographs could represent family unity is as illusory as the notion that the gold wallpaper covering the chicken wire in the house could provide insulation from the harsh winter winds. The second is that despite Lady Aberdeen’s desire to bring her brother Coutts within the security of Empire and church, the Mission Valley and therefore Guisachan were distant from the imperial centre in 1891; they were the colonial fringe and there was little support for Coutts once the Aberdeens left. And, finally, Marjorie’s metaphor of the playhouse, introduced at the beginning of this paper, is useful for considering these photographs: not only was Guisachan a place where siblings could explore and enact family rituals in an idealized setting, but for ten days in October of 1891, it became a playhouse in the sense of a theatre set for a family performance choreographed by Lady Aberdeen where each member of the cast performed for the camera’s gaze – and the family album.

NOTES

I am very grateful to Alexander Gordon, the 7th Marquess of Aberdeen and Temair, for providing a welcoming place to study *The Guisachan Album* and for granting permission to publish the images; to Ian Pooley, Fern Helfand, Hanss Lujan, Nicola Mills and Niall Irvine for their assistance, and to the anonymous reviewer for their generous comments and critical eye. To Kristina Huneault and Janice Anderson I extend my warm thanks for your brilliant initiative in founding CWAHI and for bringing this publication to fruition: your good humour, patience, and perceptive critiques have been invaluable.

- 1 I refer to Lady Aberdeen as either Ishbel or Lady Aberdeen for the sake of fluidity within the text. Her husband, John Campbell Gordon, is referred to as Lord Aberdeen.
- 2 Veronica STRONG-BOAG, “The Less Than Mighty Scot? The Quandary of John Gordon, Earl/later Marquess of Aberdeen (and Temair), 1847–1934” (paper presented at the annual meeting of the Canadian Historical Association, University of New Brunswick and St. Thomas University, Fredericton, 30–31 May and 1 June 2011). Surprisingly, there has been no in-depth scholarly study of either Lord Aberdeen or of the Aberdeens as a couple: this will be rectified with the publication of Veronica STRONG-BOAG, *Liberal Hearts and Coronets: The Lives and Times of Ishbel Marjoribanks Gordon and John Campbell Gordon, the Aberdeens* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, forthcoming).

- 3 The Guisachan Farm passed completely from their hands when it was sold in 1903; however, the Coldstream Ranch was sold to the Coldstream Estate Company Limited, in which both Aberdeens were shareholders. See Donna YOSHITAKE WUEST, *Coldstream: The Ranch Where It All Began* (Madeira Park, BC: Harbour Publishing Co. Ltd., 2005).
- 4 *The Journal of Lady Aberdeen*, 14 Oct. 1891. John Hamilton Gordon, 1st Marquess of Aberdeen and Temair fonds, MG27, 1B5, Library and Archives Canada (LAC). An edited version of the material in the Okanagan journal was published in R.M. MIDDLETON, ed., *The Journal of Lady Aberdeen: The Okanagan Valley in the Nineties* (Victoria, BC: Morriss, 1986). This paper makes use of material that was not included in Middleton's book and that has not been published.
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 Marjorie PENTLAND, *A Bonnie Fechter: The Life of Ishbel Marjoribanks, Marchioness of Aberdeen and Temair* (London: B.T. Batsford Ltd., 1952), 97.
- 7 John CAMPBELL GORDON, Marquis of Aberdeen and Temair, *Archie Gordon: An Album of Recollections* (England, 1910). A photograph entitled "Holiday Cottage, Haddo House" is reproduced with the caption "Given to the children on Christmas Day 1891 as their own house."
- 8 Oxford English Dictionary. Accessed 19 Apr. 2012, <http://www.oed.com.ezproxy.library.ubc.ca/>
- 9 ISHBEL, COUNTESS OF ABERDEEN, *Through Canada with a Kodak* (Edinburgh: W.H. White & Co., 1893).
- 10 The only scholarly treatment of the photographs to date is Marjory HARPER, "Introduction to the 1994 Edition," COUNTESS OF ABERDEEN, *Through Canada with a Kodak* (1893; reprint, Toronto, Buffalo and London: University of Toronto Press, 1994).
- 11 *Kodak Snaps by IA [Ishbel Aberdeen] at Guisachan BC 1891 and some large views of Coldstream Ranch Vernon BC*. National Register of Archives for Scotland (NRAS) NRAS55/22/3/5, Haddo House muniments held at Haddo Estate Office, Tarves, Aberdeenshire.
- 12 COUNTESS OF ABERDEEN, *Through Canada with a Kodak*, 194.
- 13 Val WILLIAMS, *Women Photographers – The Other Observers 1900 to the Present* (London: Virago Press, 1986), 15.
- 14 Rosalind KRAUSS, "A Note on Photography and The Simulacral," in *The Critical Image: Essays on Contemporary Photography*, ed. Carol Squiers (Seattle, WA: Bay Press, 1990), 19. Krauss is drawing from her reading of Pierre Bourdieu's commentary on family photography. See Pierre BOURDIEU, *Photography: A Middle-Brow Art* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990).
- 15 COUNTESS OF ABERDEEN, *Through Canada with a Kodak*, 1.
- 16 HARPER, Introduction, xxii.
- 17 The youngest brother, Archie Marjoribanks (1861–1900), was in Texas, acting as assistant-manager of the Rocking Chair Ranch on behalf of his father. See Marjory HARPER, "A Gullible Pioneer? Lord Aberdeen and the Development of Fruit Farming in the Okanagan Valley, 1890–1921," *British Journal of Canadian Studies* 1:2 (December 1986): 274, n. 7.
- 18 COUNTESS OF ABERDEEN, *Through Canada with a Kodak*, 191. It is not clear if the Aberdeens were hoping to use part of the land as a cattle ranch, though it was much too small for that purpose; however, since Coutts sold the cattle soon after arriving,

arguing that there was not enough hay to feed them, that combined with the small size of the property would seem to rule out cattle-ranching as a possibility. Earlier in *Through Canada with a Kodak* (161), Ishbel noted that in Vernon “we heard many desires expressed that the large ranche-owners [sic] in the neighbourhood could be persuaded to break up some of their property into fruit farms from 20 to 100 acres,” while in her journal entry for 17 October 1891, written at Guisachan, she comments on the local ranchers there, noting that they “are greatly impeding the progress of settlement here, [and] are not cultivating their land to any extent themselves.” *Journal of Lady Aberdeen*, 17 Oct. 1891.

- 19 Nancy Martha WEST, *Kodak and the Lens of Nostalgia* (Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 2000), 3.
- 20 Martha LANGFORD, *Suspended Conversations: The Afterlife of Memory in Photographic Albums* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2001), 97.
- 21 *The London Gazette* (30 Sept. 1881): 4891.
- 22 Larry A. MCFARLANE, “British Remittance Men as Ranchers: the Case of Coutts Marjoribanks and Edmund Thursby, 1884–95,” *Great Plains Quarterly* 638 (1991): 55.
- 23 *Ibid.*, 54.
- 24 *Private Journal of Lady Aberdeen*, unpublished, 3 July 1887. NRAS55/10/2/2, Haddo House muniments held at Haddo Estate Office.
- 25 *Ibid.*
- 26 Veronica STRONG-BOAG, “Creating ‘Big Tent’ Feminism: The Suffrage Politics of Ishbel Marjoribanks Gordon, Lady Aberdeen” (paper presented at the Berkshire Conference of Women Historians, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, 9–12 June 2011).
- 27 Jonathan C. Eaton (1890–1963) worked in the land, insurance and cattle businesses in North Dakota, and as a historian of the early years in Towner, McHenry County. He compiled a considerable archive of material, now deposited with the State Historical Society of North Dakota. He writes that Coutts “liked to drink and spent much time in the local saloons with a dubious group of companions.” See Corabelle BROWN, comp., *McHenry County: Its History and its People* (Towner, ND: Mouse River Farmers Press, 1985), 17. For information on the Eaton holdings see the “John C. Eaton Papers.” Accessed 1 Jan. 2011, <http://history.nd.gov/archives/manuscripts/inventory/10147.html>
- 28 Lord and Lady Aberdeen, *We Twa*, vol. 1 (London: W. Collins Sons, 1925), 293.
- 29 MCFARLANE, “Remittance Men,” 57–58.
- 30 BROWN, *McHenry County*, 17. Eaton’s account of the cattle rustling and carousing in saloons is disputed, however, in MCFARLANE, “Remittance Men,” 61.
- 31 PENTLAND, *A Bonnie Fechter*, 70.
- 32 COUNTESS OF ABERDEEN, *Through Canada with a Kodak*, 98.
- 33 *Journal of Lady Aberdeen*, 3 Oct. 1890.
- 34 *Ibid.*
- 35 *Ibid.*, 14 Oct. 1890.
- 36 *Ibid.*
- 37 *Ibid.*
- 38 *Ibid.* Lord Aberdeen was already the joint owner, with Ishbel’s older brother Edward Marjoribanks, of the Rocking Chair Ranch in Texas, whose assistant manager was

- Archie, the youngest brother. Marjory HARPER, *Adventurers and Exiles: The Great Scottish Exodus* (London: Profile Books, 2003), 318.
- 39 *Journal of Lady Aberdeen*, 17 Oct. 1891.
- 40 These letters are now in LAC in Ottawa. The cover of the 1890 volume reads “Letters from Canada to H.D. and J.S. from I.A.” – that is, letters from Ishbel Aberdeen to Henry Drummond, a close family friend, and James Sinclair, who was another close friend and aide-de-camp to Lord Aberdeen, and who married their daughter Marjorie in 1904. The cover of the collection of letters from their 1891 trip reads “Letters from Canada and the U.S.A. 1891 to H.D. and J.S.” Both Marjory Harper and Robert Middleton refer to these bound volumes as journals rather than by the title “Letters from Canada” and I have done the same so as to maintain consistency. For a full account of how the lives of Henry Drummond and John Sinclair, later Lord Pentland, were interwoven with those of the Aberdeens, see Doris FRENCH, *Ishbel and the Empire* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 1988).
- 41 Sara MILLS, *Discourses of Difference: An Analysis of Women’s Travel Writing and Colonialism* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), 85.
- 42 For an account of this magazine, see James DRUMMOND, *Onward and Upward: Extracts (1891–96) from the Magazine of the Onward and Upward Association/Selected and Introduced by James Drummond* (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1983).
- 43 FRENCH, *Ishbel and the Empire*, 22. French writes that “her father was undoubtedly a tyrant,” an opinion which has gone unchallenged in the Aberdeen literature.
- 44 *Journal of Lady Aberdeen*, 14 Oct. 1890.
- 45 PENTLAND, *Bonnie Fechter*, 92.
- 46 Andrea KUNARD, “Photography, Ethnology, and the Domestic Arts: Interpreting the Sir Daniel Wilson Album,” in *The Cultural Work of Photography in Canada*, ed. Carol Payne and Andrea Kunard (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2011), 44.
- 47 *Vernon News*, 24 Nov. 1892.
- 48 *Journal of Lady Aberdeen*, 27 Oct. 1891.
- 49 COUNTESS OF ABERDEEN, *Through Canada with a Kodak*, 191.
- 50 HARPER, “A Gullible Pioneer,” 259.
- 51 Catherine HALL, ed., “Introduction: Thinking the Postcolonial, Thinking the Empire,” in *Cultures of Empire: A Reader: Colonizers in Britain and the Empire in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 24–25.
- 52 Coutts Marjoribanks to Lord Aberdeen, 29 Apr. 1891. NRAS55/10/2/2, Haddo House muniments held at Haddo Estate Office.
- 53 Anthony D. KING, *The Bungalow* (London and Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984), 109. The house in North Dakota was very different, as a watercolour by Ishbel (now lost) shows: it is reproduced in Larry A. MCFARLANE, “British Remittance Men in Frontier America,” *Journal of the West* 40:1 (2001): 46.
- 54 For the history of the McDougall family, see Shirley LOUIS, *We Heard It in the Bushes* (Calgary: The Word is Out Press, 1996).
- 55 *Diary of William Dalgleish Hobson*, 3 Dec. 1891. Hobson Family Papers, Collection Robert Hobson, Kelowna.
- 56 *Journal of Lady Aberdeen*, 14 Oct. 1891.

- 57 COUNTESS OF ABERDEEN, *Through Canada with a Kodak*, 178.
- 58 *Journal of Lady Aberdeen*, 16 Oct. 1891. “Mr. Smith” was Eustace Smith, a friend of Coutts, born in Scotland in 1858 and described in the 1891 Census as “farm manager.” Government of Canada Census. Accessed 12 Apr. 2012, http://data2.collectionscanada.gc.ca/1891/pdf/30953_148094-00564.pdf
- 59 *Journal of Lady Aberdeen*, 16 Oct. 1891.
- 60 George Auldjo JAMIESON, Memorandum on the Property and Affairs of the Earl of Aberdeen in British Columbia November 1892. NRAS55/1/40/4, Haddo House muniments held at Haddo Estate Office.
- 61 Malcolm ANDREWS, *Landscape and Western Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 129.
- 62 An excellent resource for a discussion of the development of the fruit industry in the Okanagan is David DENDY and Kathleen M. KYLE, *A Fruitful Century*, ed. Joan McIntyre (Kelowna: British Columbia Fruit Growers’ Association, 1990).
- 63 COUNTESS OF ABERDEEN, *Through Canada with a Kodak*, 182.
- 64 Adele PERRY, “Bachelors in the Backwoods: White Men and Homosocial Culture in Up-Country British Columbia, 1858–71,” in *Beyond the City Limits: Rural History in British Columbia*, ed. R.W. Sandwell (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1999), 187.
- 65 *Journal of Lady Aberdeen*, 17 Oct. 1891.
- 66 Ibid.
- 67 Ibid.
- 68 Ibid., 14 Oct. 1890.
- 69 COUNTESS OF ABERDEEN, *Through Canada with a Kodak*, 186.
- 70 *Journal of Lady Aberdeen*, 16 Oct. 1891.
- 71 *Vernon News*, 15 Sept. 1892.
- 72 *Journal of Lady Aberdeen*, 20 Oct. 1895. Lord Aberdeen had been appointed Governor General in 1893.
- 73 Ibid., 17 Oct. 1891.
- 74 Ibid., 15 Oct. 1891.
- 75 For the “cult of the Highlands” see Hugh TREVOR-ROPER, “The Invention of Tradition: The Highland Tradition of Scotland,” in *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. Eric Hobsbawm and T.O. Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 39.
- 76 *Journal of Lady Aberdeen*, 23 Oct. 1891.
- 77 Ibid., 27 Oct. 1891.
- 78 Marianne HIRSCH, *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 8.
- 79 JAMIESON, Memorandum.

« Kodaking and Being Kodaked » : *The Guisachan Album* d'Ishbel, Lady Aberdeen

CAROLYN MACHARDY

Lady Aberdeen, prénommée Ishbel, compile *The Guisachan Album* à la suite du voyage qu'elle effectue en 1891 avec son mari pour visiter la nouvelle propriété qu'ils ont achetée en 1890 et baptisée Guisachan, dans la Mission Valley, aujourd'hui la Vallée de l'Okanagan, en Colombie-Britannique. L'album mince, contenant à peine 34 pages, se compose essentiellement de photos Kodak que Lady Aberdeen, photographe amateur enthousiaste, a prises durant leur séjour de dix jours. Optimistes, elle et son mari partagent alors la conviction d'un avenir glorieux pour la fruiticulture commerciale dans la Vallée. Bien des années plus tard, en se remémorant cette visite de 1891, leur fille Marjorie qui les avait accompagnés, décrivait Guisachan comme la « maison de théâtre » des Aberdeen.

En 1893, Lady Aberdeen intègre vingt-et-une de ces photos ainsi qu'un pastel dans les deux chapitres consacrés à la ferme Guisachan, comme on l'appelle, dans *Through Canada with a Kodak*, récit public – et publié – des voyages de 1890 et 1891 des Aberdeen à travers le Canada ; dans ce livre (ci-après appelé *Through Canada*), les images servaient principalement à fournir des ancrages visuels à la narration passionnée de Lady Aberdeen.

J'avance qu'une lecture attentive des photographies réunies par Lady Aberdeen dans *The Guisachan Album* révèle de l'information sur la première aventure de colonisation des Aberdeen dans la Vallée de l'Okanagan, qui n'est pas divulguée dans les deux chapitres sur Guisachan dans *Through Canada*. Mon argument s'appuie sur le fait que Guisachan a été nommée d'après le domaine du comté de l'Inverness appartenant à la famille de Lady Aberdeen, les Marjoribanks. Je m'attacherai particulièrement aux photographies qui campent la ferme Guisachan comme le site où l'on pourrait réenvisager et inscrire sur cette terre nouvellement acquise des bribes, soigneusement choisies, de l'histoire récente de la famille Marjoribanks, particulièrement celles de son frère Coutts. De mon point de vue, l'achat de Guisachan en Colombie-Britannique en octobre 1890 était une tentative minutieusement orchestrée par Lady Aberdeen de réécrire la biographie à ce jour de son frère qu'elle surnommait affectueusement « Couttsy ». La ferme Guisachan, dont

deux cents acres seraient voués à la culture commerciale de fruits et le reste à la production agricole mixte, constituait le site idéal pour la réhabilitation de Coutts et ses fortunes, et l'album de Guisachan, monté par Ishbel pour la famille, fournirait des preuves documentaires de la réussite de cette entreprise.

Si *The Guisachan Album* doit être lu comme un document qui tente de rétablir la réputation de Coutts au sein de la famille, il faudrait rapiécer quelques fragments biographiques et démêler les fils qui le lient à sa sœur Ishbel autour des années 1890. L'article examine les journaux tenus par Lady Aberdeen pour démontrer son affection profonde pour son frère et son inquiétude grandissante quant à son bien-être dans son ranch au Dakota du Nord, où en 1884 ou 1885, il avait entrepris de faire de l'élevage. À mon avis, c'est au cours de la visite de 1887 de Lord et Lady Aberdeen au ranch du Dakota du Nord que l'on trouve les germes du projet d'envoyer Coutts quelque part dans l'étreinte de l'Empire et de l'Église. Ayant noté dans son journal que son frère s'adaptait à la vie dans l'Ouest américain, Lady Aberdeen expose alors sa grande préoccupation : l'influence de la culture à la frontière américaine sur la vie spirituelle et morale de son frère célibataire âgé de vingt-sept ans. La remarque d'Ishbel sur la vie religieuse déficiente au Dakota du Nord n'était pas simplement un commentaire cru de sa part ; elle traduisait plutôt, à mon avis, sa crainte de voir Coutts se laisser entraîner dans un mode de vie qu'elle jugeait irresponsable et immoral, inquiétude d'ailleurs étayée par des ouï-dire selon lesquels il buvait et faisait la fête dans les bars du Dakota du Nord. Les Aberdeen réagissent en faisant une visite au Canada, sous le prétexte officiel des ordres du médecin, et commencent les démarches pour faire déménager Coutts. Vers la fin des années 1890, Coutts quitte le Dakota du Nord pour s'installer à Guisachan.

Mon examen du *Guisachan Album* s'inspire des travaux d'historiennes comme Marjory Harper et Adele Perry, et d'historiennes de la photographie, notamment Val Williams et Marianne Hirsch. L'album renferme deux groupements thématiques : je me penche d'abord sur un groupe de photos qui focalisent la maison et la ferme proprement dite, soulignant la centralité de Coutts par rapport à l'entreprise ; j'examine ensuite trois groupes de photos qui le placent au cœur de la famille, participant à des activités avec sa sœur, sa nièce et son beau-frère. Or, la première photo s'intitule « Kodaking and Being Kodaked at Guisachan B.C. », que Lady Aberdeen a décidé de ne pas inclure dans *Through Canada*, probablement parce qu'elle avait été prise par quelqu'un d'autre. Cette photo, tout en établissant qu'Ishbel est bien l'auteure de la narration photographique, peut être interprétée comme une revendication de la terre tout récemment achetée et nommée d'après son domaine familial en Écosse.

Je puise aussi dans les journaux privés de Lady Aberdeen les récits au fil des événements. Il s'agit en fait d'une série de lettres écrites sur le papier à lettres personnel d'Ishbel et renvoyées en Grande-Bretagne pour les faire circuler parmi les amis et la famille. Elles avaient été colligées puis recouvertes d'une reliure, dans l'intention de les faire publier. Ainsi, certaines d'elles, soigneusement choisies, ont fait l'objet de courts articles parus sous forme de série dans la revue du domaine Haddo House, *Onward and Upward*, qui a commencé la publication en 1891, puis, sans autres modifications, dans *Through Canada*. Cependant, ce sont les sections intégrales des journaux, dont certaines n'ont pas été publiées, qui retiennent l'attention quand on les lit en parallèle avec les photos du *The Guisachan Album*. À mon avis, ces journaux et les photos groupées par thème dans l'album doivent être lus comme des récits minutieusement construits, compilés pour justifier l'achat de la propriété et pour détourner la désapprobation patriarcale anticipée du père de Lady Aberdeen, Dudley Coutts Marjoribanks, déjà fâché contre Coutts pour son échec avec le ranch du Dakota du Nord, et dont la colère capricieuse pouvait facilement basculer en direction des Aberdeen.

Les photographies de Lady Aberdeen rassemblées dans *The Guisachan Album* permettent de multiples interprétations, mais en conclusion je m'appuie sur trois points. Le premier, les Aberdeen n'étaient restés à Guisachan que peu de temps. Il serait donc purement illusoire de penser que les photographies pourraient représenter l'unité familiale. Le deuxième, malgré le désir de Lady Aberdeen de mettre son frère en sécurité au sein de l'Empire et de l'Église, Mission Valley et donc Guisachan en Colombie-Britannique se trouvaient éloignés du centre impérial en 1891. De plus, ces lieux représentaient la frange coloniale, et il y avait peu de soutien pour Coutts après le départ des Aberdeen. Troisième point : la métaphore de la maison de théâtre, dont j'ai parlé au début de mon article, est utile pour examiner les photos : non seulement Guisachan était un endroit où la fratrie pouvait explorer et pratiquer les rituels familiaux dans un cadre idéalisé, mais pendant dix jours en octobre 1891, elle est devenue un théâtre monté pour une représentation familiale chorégraphiée par Lady Aberdeen, où chaque acteur jouait pour l'œil de l'objectif – et l'album de famille.