



“And thereon lies a tale”: Canadian Women Missionary Artists in China

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In the Toronto holdings of the Archives of the United Church of Canada can be found an arresting photographic image (Fig. 1) of a tiny woman who, though surrounded by heavy carved furniture and a march of posters along one wall, seems to dominate the room through the thin pen that firmly anchors her hand to a neatly organized, productive desktop. The function and name of the sitter – “Press artist Mrs. Kitchen” – is provided on the back of the photograph. Its location in the Foreign Missions Photograph Collection quickly leads researchers to a fuller identification. Pictured is Beatrice Irene McDowell Kitchen (1887–1947), a Canadian woman who worked as the principal artist for the Canadian (Methodist) Mission Press in Chengdu, Sichuan Province, China from ca. 1922 until her death.¹

A carefully constructed image, the undated photograph is accompanied neither by the maker’s name nor by any indication of its intended use. As such, little stands in the way of allowing it to service a range of conversations about Euro-Canadian women within the Protestant missionary sphere in China in the first half of the twentieth century. With its decisive positioning of woman as producer of that which is for public rather than domestic consumption, it is tempting, certainly, to interpret the photograph as an invitation to investigate the ways in which Canadian Christianity constructed its overseas female mission workers as models for the “modernizing” of Chinese attitudes towards women. Such a venture would not be without value: the words hovering closely around Beatrice Kitchen during her lifetime reveal a mission world much taken up with, indeed troubled by, its long-standing, self-imposed mandate to rescue China’s women. One of Kitchen’s drawings, specifically of a policewoman, was used in 1929 to illustrate a section entitled “Exalts Womanhood” in a United Church of Canada publication by Rev. Leslie G. Kilborn. The text defended the missionary refusal to stop challenging traditional Chinese values, even though this left the “poor old-fashioned male . . . bewildered by seeing women in government,

Detail, Harriet MacCurdy, *Untitled*, pastel on board, ca. 1926, collection of Julien LeBourdais, Ontario. (Photo: Julien LeBourdais)



1 | *Press artist Mrs. Kitchen*, n.d., Foreign Missions Photograph Collection, United Church of Canada Archives, 1999.001P/2788. (Photo: United Church of Canada Archives)

in the professions, in industry . . . and . . . [finding himself] in court . . . because he took a concubine.”² At almost the same time, Rev. Richard O. Jolliffe, overall supervisor of the Canadian Mission Press, revealed himself to be much less certain about the subject during a speech he gave in Toronto to the Dominion Board of the Women’s Missionary Society of the United Church. As reported by *The Globe*, he was concerned with what might follow from the gains in freedom for Chinese women: “It is a precarious experiment, this giving women their freedom in any land, viewed from the standpoint of civilization . . . It has been claimed for China that no nation has been able to exist and retain its civilization except China and she has done it by keeping her women in bondage.”³

Appealing as it might be to glance but occasionally at the Toronto photograph while focusing on the conflicted gender politics of the Canadian missionary movement, more highly qualified historians have already waded into those waters.⁴ Here I will give the artifact a much more direct role, using it as a call for art historians to both search for and consider from an art historical perspective the production of women, including McDowell

Kitchen, who may still be tucked away in missionary terrain. To be sure, the photograph must still wrestle with its missionary origins, never more strongly than when the urge to read agency, indeed control, into the person of “Mrs. Kitchen” runs up against a 1937 description of her issued by Rev. Jesse H. Arnup, Secretary of the United Church of Canada Foreign Missions:

[A] demure and unobtrusive little woman works to the limit of her strength as illustrator for the Press. And thereon hangs a tale. In the days of her youth, she was an artist of girlhood dreams of great achievement in her chosen career. Then came the call to China and missionary service. Only one circumstance made [the] decision difficult; in China, with all the duties of the missionary, she saw no room for her beloved art. Finally, the choice was made and the prospect of an artistic career was given up out of loyalty to her Lord. But the Master Artist had other plans for her. The work of the West China Press has presented a greater opportunity and a wider field than ever were compassed by her girl-hood dreams . . . The Lord of beauty found a place for the talent she was willing to surrender for His sake.⁵

However, at a time when art historians brought together under the aegis of the Canadian Women Artists History Initiative (CWAHI) are asked to think about what might be done to ensure that significant gaps do not haunt the crafting of any new history or histories of women and art in Canada, the photograph can be engaged just as usefully in another campaign.⁶ It can ground an assertion that the vigorous Canadian involvement in the global missionary movement needs to be mined closely for the presence of women artists. No matter how the commissioner and the maker of the image conceptualized a female “Press artist,” the resulting photograph points to a reality: at least one Canadian woman took artistic training and fascination for the visual into the missionary field with her. Where there is one such individual there are liable to be more, and when more in fact are found, thought needs to be given as to how these expatriates should figure in the stories about women and art in Canada. The focus here will be on mainland China, where Canadian missionaries from Protestant denominations were thick on the ground in certain provinces from the late nineteenth century through to 1959, but the Canadian share of the larger missionary globe beckons as well.

If Canadian enthusiasm over the late nineteenth-century decision by Christians to evangelize the world is not as well-known as it once was, research since the 1970s has begun to insist on its significance, attaching understandable urgency to reading its impact on native communities. China has come under scrutiny as well and not without good reason. Alwyn Austin’s

publications, most notably his *Saving China: Canadian Missionaries in the Middle Kingdom 1888–1959*, as well as numerous studies of denomination-specific initiatives, have reawakened consciousness of an important era which preceded the heroics of Dr. Norman Bethune, even as it created the conditions for his acceptance in China.⁷ These studies have pressed out some indelible mental images of what once was an almost inescapable part of the Canadian experience: massive recruitment gatherings in university halls, torchlight parades through streets to send off those who had been persuaded, gruesome newspaper reports of the fate of local missionary heroes, and the like. Similarly, striking utterances – many not likely to be forgotten quickly as scholars probe the history of Canada-China relations on any number of fronts – have been excavated, with, for example, Hudson Taylor, a British missionary leader, evoking in 1888 an iconic Canadian image as he tried, successfully it turns out, to pull on Canadian hearts: “There is a great Niagara of souls passing into the dark in China. Every day, every week, every month, they are passing away! A million a month in China are dying without God.”⁸

As the twentieth century dawned, accumulations of missionaries associated with Canadian Protestant denominations began to form in a number of areas in China, hoping to staunch the perceived loss of souls. The Presbyterian Church, urged on by Chinese-Canadian converts, established small footholds in what became the South China Mission of the United Church of Canada in 1925.⁹ The northern part of Henan province attracted a large contingent of Canadian Presbyterians, brought there under the leadership of Jonathan Goforth and his wife, Rosalind, perhaps not inconsequentially the daughter of the well-known artist John Bell-Smith, sister of Frederic M. Bell-Smith and herself having trained at the Toronto School of Art before leaving for China.¹⁰ In the southern part of Henan gathered a group of Canadian Anglicans whose presence in Kaifeng is recalled quickly today when walking through the Bishop White Gallery of Chinese Temple Art at the Royal Ontario Museum.¹¹ Above all, Canadian Methodist, later United, Church activities in Sichuan province, headquartered in the capital Chengdu, took shape as a symbol of Canadian zeal for “teaching, preaching and healing.”¹² By the beginning of the 1920s, this West China Mission, overlooking Tibet and serving huge portions of the largest province in China, had some 200 missionaries “and was regarded as one of the most professional anywhere in the world.”¹³ The Methodist Church of Canada was also one of the five Protestant denominational groups (the others being from the United States and the United Kingdom) to found and operate the West China Union University in Chengdu, popularly known as Huada. Serving a population base of some 100 million people, this Christian institution benefitted from the presence of faculty with degrees from all of Canada’s major institutions. The medical and dental colleges, the latter established

by the Canadian Rev. A.W. Lindsay, were considered outstanding centres of education and research, and a recent article points to Canadian contributions to the innovative sociology program pioneered by Harold Deeks Robertson, a University of Toronto graduate.¹⁴

It is a search across this vast terrain that the Toronto photograph is being asked to solicit. The “discoveries” recounted here are intended to do little more than suggest the rewards of such travel, even if the “pencil dipped in fire to paint the condition of this people” sought by Hudson Taylor has not been and may never be found.¹⁵ A full survey of Canadian missionary involvement in China will not be quick. Major centres of Canadian activity are there as obvious stops, but since Canadian Protestant denominations were somewhat later than their American and British counterparts in establishing operations, some Canadians joined in the work of other English-language groupings and continued to do so long after national options became available. Such was the route to China of Harriet Russell MacCurdy (1883–1961), a new recruit for the Canadian Women Artists History Initiative’s consideration. Hattie, as she was often called in official sources, elected to become part of an American Presbyterian mission located in a province, Anhui, with no Canadian centre and one of the lowest per-capita missionary ratios in the country.

MacCurdy, a member of a *Blue Book* family centred around her father, Rev. Dr. James Frederick McCurdy, at times a controversial theologian and the indisputable champion of Aryan-Semitic studies at the University of Toronto, left for China in 1913.¹⁶ Signing on as an evangelical and educational worker funded by the Central Presbyterian Church of New York City under its Women’s Work program, she was stationed until 1941 in that Church’s prized overseas mission in Huaiyuan, a small walled town of about thirty thousand located 150 miles north of Nanjing.¹⁷ She taught women students in the town’s Bible school, proselytized to gatherings of women in tiny villages throughout the region and was highly enough regarded as an educator to replace the furloughed head of the Bible Teachers Training School for Women in the capital city of Nanjing from 1930–1931.¹⁸ Working alongside respected evangelical and medical missionaries, many of whom had been associated with her father’s Princeton alma mater, MacCurdy was a delegate to various important religious gatherings in China, and penned accounts of Huaiyuan missionary activities and general conditions in China for mission organizations and publications. Like so many of her peers, she was directly caught up in the changing political and military landscapes of early twentieth-century China, forced to wait out “anti-foreign” activities in 1927 in Qingdao and, during the War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression, protecting refugees who had managed to escape the horrors inflicted upon the people of Nanjing.¹⁹ Her writings were almost invariably optimistic, even when dealing

with the Japanese conflict. They were guided by the experiencing of “Christ’s reconciling love” as she listened to “the prayers of the Chinese for Japan, and of the Japanese for China,” and by the conviction that “God-control” would provide “the completion of the world’s needs.”²⁰ This refusal to accept the power of aggression may have been what attracted her to the ideas of the Oxford Group, the predecessor organization of the Moral Re-Armament revivalist movement: she attended one of its renowned house parties in England in 1934 while on furlough.²¹

Against this backdrop of sustained public performance as a missionary, it is perhaps not surprising that Harriet MacCurdy was described in a 1948 *Globe and Mail* article as a retired missionary with “a life-long hobby of painting.”²² Sadly, this characterization of her art-making masked a much more interesting MacCurdy, a woman who appears to have carefully maintained two distinct professional identities.

MacCurdy’s missionary identity was certainly of enormous and anything but accidental significance, having emerged as it did within a context in which the spiritual needs of the individual and society were never distant abstractions. Her paternal and maternal grandfathers had been Presbyterian ministers, her maternal uncle, who visited Toronto frequently, was a Presbyterian minister in Oyster Bay, Rhode Island, and enjoyed a close and very public friendship with Theodore Roosevelt, while certain cousins, either a generation at remove or immediate, had a virtual lock on Presbyterian periodical publishing in Canada.²³ When she decided in 1910 to enter the new Berlin-based Sozialen Frauenschule der Inneren Mission for a year of study, she would not have been a naïve recruit to the idea of social action.²⁴ The same must be said for her decision to take up the cause of China after she had spent several months in Jerusalem with her father, who at the time was head of the American School of Oriental Research in that city.

The only one of four McCurdy children to take up religious work, Harriet’s interest in making art probably developed earlier than her desire to enter what could be called the “family business.”²⁵ She was associated with Mary Ella Dignam and the Women’s Art Association of Canada (WAAC) from her early teens and followed up her occasional studies at the University of Toronto with a year (1905–1906) at the Art Students League in New York City.²⁶ By the time she took up in 1909 what proved to be a temporary position as an art teacher at Toronto’s Westminster Ladies College, she had acquired an exhibition record that spanned several years, covered three Canadian cities (Toronto, Montreal and Ottawa) and was pleasantly embellished with favourable reviews. Her contribution, *A Harmony in Yellow*, to a 1901 exhibition of the WAAC was said to be “very suggestive of talent and individuality,” and the *Montreal Gazette* heaped praise on a large painting of hers that was part of the Women’s Art Exhibition held in Montreal

in November 1903: “[it] shows capital mastery of palette knife . . . and is remarkable for its wonderful atmosphere and shadow.”²⁷

In 1908, she participated in one of the Thumb-Box Exhibitions held at the W. Scott and Sons’ Galleries, Yonge Street, Toronto, exhibiting alongside several associate members of the Royal Canadian Academy and other professional artists of future consequence for Canadian art.²⁸ This successful, educated encounter with the art world went into the luggage MacCurdy took with her to Huaiyuan, and moved back and forth across oceans with her in the years to come. On her first furlough home in 1919–1920, she held a solo exhibition through the auspices of the WAAC in Toronto, and then headed south to New York City.²⁹ There she organized a solo exhibition of paintings of the “Holy Land” and China in the Touchstone Galleries – a show that was favourably reviewed in the *New York Tribune* – and showed two works with the Society of Independent Artists.³⁰ Part of her second full furlough in 1925 was spent negotiating a visit to the Barnes Foundation in Philadelphia so she might study the Cezannes, a serious campaign conducted without reference to her status as a missionary. Instead she mustered the support of two prominent New York women, always identified in the press as daughters of the former Secretary of War under Grover Cleveland, but independently active in various art-related capacities.³¹

MacCurdy’s third official home leave, 1933–1934, embraced “an attractive” solo show at the WAAC in Toronto, which saw her hang paintings made in China, on her trip home through Russia, Germany and England, and during the summer months in Ontario, the latter capturing “the rock and pine beauty of the Georgian Bay.”³² The WAAC event also featured fundraising through the sale of embroidery made by students in Huaiyuan. Another border crossing led to “Pastels of Chinese and Korean Temples” at the short-lived Etcetera Galleries in New York City, an exhibition which the *New York Times* briefly acknowledged for its “appealing” views of Mount Taishan, one of the most visited pilgrimage and tourist sites in China.³³ 1941 was supposed to have been another furlough year, but the onset of war between Japan and the United States while she was back in North America prevented MacCurdy’s planned return to China. What had almost certainly been intended as her normal brief excursion into the New York art scene was converted into an exhibition, “Pastels of China,” at the Guy Mayer Gallery, the proceeds of which were to be used for educating Chinese women and for famine/flood relief.³⁴ “Vigorous work, this,” was the verdict of the important New York critic Howard Devree, while *Arts Magazine* focused on its “green pleasantries.”³⁵

This line-up of North American exhibitions might lead one to assume that MacCurdy thought of herself as a missionary in China, someone who but squeezed painting into a few spare moments she could grab, and as a

public artist when “at home.” In fact, geographic distance was not required for her to assert herself in the visual realm: the English-language press of Shanghai records the appearance of MacCurdy the artist at least twice during her years in China. She placed work in a group exhibition mounted by the city’s British Women’s Association (BWA) in 1923, with pastels that “charm[ed] through their strong use of colour and thoughtful composition.”³⁶ No fewer than one hundred objects – oils, watercolour, pastel, pencil and pen and ink – comprised a solo exhibition the BWA organized in December 1927. One press review included photographs of two of her pastels, a fairly rare occurrence, while another celebrated her “touch of brilliant colour such as is rarely to be seen in this drab town.”³⁷ Such acclaim might be dismissed as inevitable gratitude from a starving expatriate community, but to do that would be wrong. Sometimes ridiculed by their contemporaries, British and American women worked very hard to construct a lively Western art milieu in the “Paris of the East.” The Shanghai English-language critics who engaged with their efforts were demanding of local amateurs and professionally trained expatriate artists, some of whom had had work “hung on the line” at the Royal Academy.³⁸ They did not go easy on visiting artists either.

Although research on daily life in Huaiyuan and its smaller missionary outposts is thin, nothing encountered so far in missionary literature suggests that MacCurdy’s art was thought to have aided her evangelical and educational duties. The founder of the Huaiyuan mission had, early in the century, celebrated his missionaries’ “kodak pictures of their homes and the scenes about them, which are often thrown upon the screen” as a way of maintaining homebound interest, but a placement of MacCurdy’s work in the realm of public relations is not evident.³⁹ Nor, based on what can be learned through the titles of her artworks, the photographs of the few pastels that to date have been retrieved and the reviews of her accomplishments, can one presume a foregrounding of her missionary occupation in the making and the general reception of her art. Rather, her production can be associated quite happily with the creations of her secular, predominantly female peers in China. She pictured temple compounds (Fig. 2), Venetianized waterscapes (Fig. 3), popular pilgrimage sites, and landscapes of the places such as the seaside resort of Beidaihe in which individual foreigners and whole missionary communities gathered in the summers to avoid the heat. The responses to her work, whether in China or North America, satisfied what had come to be expected in secular societies of such imaging: a normalization of the “foreign” for expatriates and a taste of far-off China for those who could not visit a place of fascination.⁴⁰

Once MacCurdy was unable to return to China, she converted her art into a form of mission service. Additionally, and possibly to enhance fundraising possibilities, she dramatized the conditions of production, writing for *Who’s*



2 | Harriet MacCurdy,
Untitled, pastel on board,
ca. 1926, collection of
Julien LeBourdais, Ontario.
(Photo: Julien LeBourdais)

Who of her “evangelistic travels in China by wheelbarrow, donkey, rickshaw, ox-cart, small river boats.”⁴¹ Upon her death, what had once been described as a hobby and might later have been thought of as purely instrumental activity was simply forgotten, left out of obituaries in the *New York Times* and the *Globe and Mail*.⁴²

A rich history of Canadian art, whether general or focused on women, might very well cede a small if vibrant space to MacCurdy, a lifelong supporter of the understudied Women’s Art Association of Canada. One of many women of the early twentieth century who sought to use their professional training to perform in the public sphere, she enjoyed some



3 | Harriet MacCurdy, *Untitled*, pastel on board, ca. 1926, collection of Julien LeBourdais, Ontario. (Photo: Julien LeBourdais)

success in at least three countries and two continents, a range obviously not available to the majority. She might also warrant a footnote in discussions of the friendship circles and conversations that sustained Canadian artists at home. Her sister Isabel, an active proponent of women’s suffrage and a major supporter of the WAAC, along with her brother-in-law, the lawyer Frank Erichsen-Brown, ran a Toronto home and a Georgian Bay cottage made warm for the likes of A.Y. Jackson (1882–1974), Lawren Harris (1885–1970), Will Ogilvie (1901–1989), and Fred Varley (1881–1969).⁴³ Harriet spent time in those environments when not in China.

More than a corner in any history of Canadian art is likely to be required for Beatrice McDowell Kitchen. Simply put, the “unassuming little” sitter for the photograph mentioned earlier was probably Canada’s most prolific image maker from the early 1920s through the mid-1940s, with vast audiences collecting around her work. If MacCurdy urges us to look in small American or British-run centres of missionary activity for Canadian “sisters of the



4 | Cecil Beaton,
*Typesetting at the Canadian
Mission Press, Chengtu,
Szechuan, China, 1944,*
Imperial War Museum, IB
2652c. (Photo: © Imperial
War Museum)

brush,” McDowell Kitchen’s existence reveals that highly productive women missionary artists can sink from view even when they lived their lives in the midst of major, highly visible overseas Canadian populations. McDowell Kitchen was not tucked away. She lived for twenty-one years in a city of half a million people until the War Against Japanese Aggression, followed by the onset of the Second World War in the Pacific, flooded it with many more people and brought it increasingly into the view of the world press.⁴⁴ Moreover she worked for an important organization. From its foundation in Chengdu in 1905, the Canadian (Methodist) Mission Press had been the only Christian press west of Hankou and in the late 1930s it stepped forward to provide shelter for a number of displaced Christian literature agencies. Cecil Beaton’s memorable 1944 image of typesetters (Fig. 4), taken the year before McDowell Kitchen left for a furlough in Canada, speaks eloquently to the stature of the Press during wartime, when it added printing for the British Ministry of Information to its agenda.⁴⁵

Unlike MacCurdy, Beatrice McDowell Kitchen had not been born into a prominent religious family. She was raised in a reasonably successful southern Ontario farming household, her father being an executive member of the

local agricultural board and her mother having been a schoolteacher prior to her marriage.⁴⁶ At about the time her parents left Ontario for a series of western Canadian locales, McDowell trained in commercial art in Toronto and Chicago, and by 1911 had begun what was described at the time in a small Ontario newspaper as a successful career as an illustrator and cartoonist in Vancouver.⁴⁷ Once her parents settled in Griffin, Saskatchewan, she is said to have worked for the catalogue division of Eaton's Department Store, probably submitting her "sketches of elegant dresses, hats and shoes" in Regina.⁴⁸

In 1918, Beatrice McDowell married John Kitchen, a newly minted, British-born Methodist minister who had earlier apprenticed in the United States as a printer. Two years later they set out to be missionaries in China, Beatrice having long passed the age of the "girlhood dreams" mentioned by Arnup. The couple and the first of what would become three daughters were supported by the Saskatchewan Conference Board of the Methodist, later United, Church of Canada, part of a contingent of twenty missionary personnel being sent from across Canada to West China that year.⁴⁹

After two years of language training in Junghsien, the Kitchens moved to Chengdu. John became the pastor of a small church and, befitting his professional training, operations manager of the Canadian (Methodist) Mission Press. A photograph taken just before the arrival of the Kitchens shows a largely Chinese staff of close to one hundred already associated with the Press, and for good reason: by 1920, 3.5 million pages of religious text were being produced every month, in a variety of languages including Tibetan, Lisu, and Hua of the "Miao Tribesmen," with work being shipped out to fourteen of China's eighteen regular provinces. Money was brought into the enterprise through a Book Room, the sale of paper and ink and the printing of books for secular organizations.⁵⁰ Under Kitchen's management, all these activities were to flourish.

Effectively non-salaried, with relatively small spousal funding having been rolled into her husband's compensation, Beatrice McDowell Kitchen quickly began to fill what became an enormous portfolio of visual work, almost always signed with her name or the initial 'K,' for the Press and its clients.⁵¹ She illustrated the new monthly Chinese-language newspaper *Christian Hope* (Fig. 5), offering both picturesque perspectives on the country and images to support such pointed endeavours as the anti-opium campaign.⁵² She supplied designs for small religious and health-related tracts distributed throughout the region, for children's booklets and for the four-to-five colour lithographic posters, prior to 1940 printed in Shanghai, used by missionaries when they presented in market towns. From 1931 on, as part of a growing emphasis on visual evangelism, she was intensely involved with the making of images for Sunday school teaching, a number of which fortunately have survived



5 | Beatrice McDowell Kitchen, cover illustration for *Christian Hope* 8:1 (1931). (Photo: author)

and are held by the School of Oriental and African Studies in London, UK (Figs. 6 and 7).⁵³ They were simple, charming drawings, made to “appeal to the young mind” and finely tuned to the social values encouraged by the missionary community. Requests for samples were received from as far away as Singapore, some were used in Shanghai and, according to one source, by 1941 tens of thousands of comparable sheets designed by McDowell Kitchen were going directly into Chinese homes each week, in addition to those being used more traditionally at Sunday School gatherings.⁵⁴

Just as the Press itself had to stretch to meet the call upon its services during wartime, McDowell Kitchen had to ramp up her activities, one suspects no mean feat for an individual whose work schedule was anything but leisurely. Included in new responsibilities was the task of providing illustrations for *The Christian Farmer*, an important Chinese-language publication on progressive farming, the headquarters of which had been forced to move from North China.⁵⁵ Her drawing pencil animated the pages of other displaced journals and newspapers.



6 | Beatrice McDowell Kitchen, *Image for Sunday School Teaching*, William Gawan Sewell Collection, School of Oriental and African Studies Library, London, SOAS PP MS 16, 06.04. (Photo: Courtesy of Ruth Baker)

Various forms of evangelical activity were thus given visual appeal and instructional assistance by McDowell Kitchen and the wood-block cutters and lithographers she directed. But she also contributed heavily to the community comprised of missionaries, whether the expatriate North Americans and British who had flocked to Chengdu or the missionary administrators and supporters located across the seas. She embellished the much-treasured, interdenominational *West China Missionary News* from time to time and supplied illustrations for some of the papers the missionary-scientists in Sichaun proudly published in their *Journal of the West China Border Research Society*.⁵⁶ Her work appeared in a number of books written by Canadian missionaries/mission administrators, where she was fully credited under the name Beatrice McDowell Kitchen for having provided “Art designs.” Perhaps reflecting both her busy schedule and the perceived prestige of her designs,



7 | Beatrice McDowell Kitchen, *Image for Sunday School Teaching*, William Gawan Sewell Collection, School of Oriental and African Studies Library, London, SOAS PP MS 16, 06.04. (Photo: Courtesy of Ruth Baker)

some were used rather like stock photographs. An image of a well-ordered landscape with terraced hills and peaceful farmers working in the fields was, for example, inserted into a stinging critique of Confucianism in one text and then functioned eighteen years later in a book by a different author to register “the poignant background of the human scene in West China.”⁵⁷

In the midst of all this targeted production, a place was carved out by the Mission Press and by the Methodist/United Church of Canada for McDowell Kitchen’s presence as an “artist” whose work was said to appeal both inside and outside organized faith. While still studying the Chinese language in Junghsien, and fulfilling no specific illustrative mandate, she allowed page after page of her drawings addressing such themes as physical labour in China and the activities of children to be reproduced in *The West China Missionary News*.⁵⁸ The response to these images persuaded the Press to publish them

8 | Beatrice McDowell
Kitchen, cover for *Toilers of
China*, 1923. (Photo: author)



in inexpensive portfolios printed on “good drawing paper.” Thus was born *Toilers of China* in 1923 (Fig. 8). Described as a “small artistic volume,” the little book, which might also “enable us to bring home this thought [Bitter Labor] to those who sit in smug comfort in our homelands,”⁵⁹ was joined a year later by *Chinese Children: Pen and Ink Sketches from Chinese Life*, deemed to be an appropriate Christmas souvenir for those in the field and in the “homeland.”⁶⁰ Filled with images she later told the *Globe and Mail* had always been drawn from life, these books, along with her proselytizing images, resulted in her being given in 1935 the title of “the Jessie Willcox Smith of China” by a writer for the *International Journal of Religious Education*, an American publication.⁶¹ The choice as a reference point of Willcox Smith (1863–1935) – known throughout North America for her renderings of children in books and on covers for such wildly popular publications as *Good Housekeeping* – was interesting.⁶² It placed McDowell Kitchen within a framework of dignified illustrative art rather than the commercial art background from which she had come but which was never mentioned in missionary sources. It also meant that the Canadian woman’s visions of



9 | Elizabeth Otis
Dunn, *Chinese Babyhood*,
watercolour, as reproduced
in *China Journal of Science
and Arts* 4:5 (December
1926): n.p. (Photo: author)

Chinese children were seen as extensions of a “natural,” everyday North American compassion for childhood, rather than as the type of small “exotics” created by such American artist-visitors to China as Helen Hyde, Bertha Lum and Elizabeth Otis Dunn (Fig. 9).⁶³ When McDowell Kitchen died in the crash of an airplane taking her back to Chengdu, some of her more fully worked-up images of children, the kind of scenes which functioned so well to attract support for mission work, were published in a memorial booklet entitled *For Such is the Kingdom of Heaven*.⁶⁴

On both sides of the Pacific, then, Beatrice McDowell Kitchen was a known art producer, although she did not have an exhibition profile per se in Canada. In China, her reach would have been large indeed: as one of her eulogists insisted, “Her initial ‘K’ came to be known all over China,” underwriting both her mission-specific and her “artistic” visualizations.⁶⁵ Her audience in Canada would have been more restricted, although the number of people who followed what went on in missionary fields should not be underestimated. Nor should the impact of a very complimentary article about her appearing in the *Globe and Mail* of 15 June 1946, be discounted. While

discussing the picturesque details of her producing life in China, her “rare understanding” was emphasized and significant recognition for her work was claimed from “Westerners active in the field of art in China.”⁶⁶ In other words, she was granted credibility on two continents.

McDowell Kitchen’s individual practice openly invites scholarly consideration, the outlines of which are only beginning to come into view. Given an awareness of MacCurdy’s very different career, a fuller picture might recognize a particular framework for McDowell Kitchen’s production, one keeping largely intact the category of “missionary artist.” Discovered on mission terrain, MacCurdy could and did exist autonomously, albeit sporadically, outside the compound, whereas McDowell Kitchen lived, from 1920 onward, what appears to have been a comparatively sustained religious calling rendered through the visual, with what some characterized as “artistic” work being closely framed by her missionary outlook. That being said, there is much more to accomplish prior to any serious consideration of McDowell Kitchen, whether as an individual art maker or as part of a vibrant Chengdu peer group.

We can gain fleeting glimpses of members of that peer group in the pages of the *West China Missionary News*. For example, in the 1941 December issue is to be found a description of a large exhibition of reproductions of Christian art, which McDowell Kitchen and a Mrs. Dickinson helped organize to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the National Committee for Christian Religious Education, then meeting in Chengdu. It was held in the gymnasium of the West China Union University, where over two days some 2,500 people, including the pupils of the Canadian School for missionary children, hastened to see the display during daylight hours as there was no electricity. A vast array of images were hung on the walls – some brought to Chengdu by airplane – including a copy of Michelangelo’s *Creation*, examples of what was being made by the Christian students at Beijing’s Catholic Fu-Jen University, and a large number of Bible illustrations created by the British artist Harold Copping.⁶⁷ Allowed through this text, which also expressed hope for more art to look at in the future, is exposure to what eventually may prove to have been a world in which the visual arts were prized both for instruction and pleasure, in part, perhaps even in large part, because of the presence of Canadian women with serious artistic interests and accomplishments. The “Mrs. Dickinson” referred to was one of at least two other Canadian women who used their professional art training to support missionary activities in Chengdu and its environs and to tend to the aesthetic needs of an implanted community. Together with McDowell Kitchen, they constitute the core of a small band of women artists first made known to me through a generous letter from the late Dr. Betty Bridgman, raised in Sichuan herself and later a medical missionary in the Republic of Angola.⁶⁸



10 | Anna Crosse Kinney Morse, watercolour reproduced in William Reginald Morse's *The Three Crosses in the Purple Mists, An Adventure in Medical Education under the Eaves of the Roof of the World*, 1928, n.p. (Photo: author)

The eldest of the Canadian group was Anna Crosse Kinney Morse (1875–1951). A Nova Scotian graduate of the Acadia Seminary in Wolfville with advanced art training from New York City's Cooper Union, she accompanied her Nova Scotia-born husband, Dr. William Reginald Morse, to Sichuan in 1909, and almost immediately began teaching art in the girl's school attached to the small American Baptist missionary station at Siufu.⁶⁹ From 1916 until their final departure in 1937, she and her husband were located in Chengdu, where she assisted Dr. Morse in his anatomy teaching, in his administrative positions, including that of Dean of Huada's Medical College, and in organizing sessions for The West China Border Research Society he founded.⁷⁰ Three of her watercolours (Fig. 10) were inserted into his 1928 book, *The Three Crosses in the Purple Mists, An Adventure in Medical Education under the Eaves of the Roof of the World*. Her saturated yet serene picturings of the mighty Yangtze function as powerful acts of visual evangelism; they overlook the difficulties of transporting humans some 1,800 miles inland to Chengdu and enjoin the viewer to volunteer for West China service.⁷¹ Viewed as more than a mere adjunct to Dr. Morse, Anna Kinney Morse was listed in the West China Union University catalogue as an instructor in Anatomical

Drawing and also as an instructor in Art in the tiny Fine Arts program largely dominated by music.⁷² Beyond mission-related work as an image-maker and teacher, Kinney Morse organized exhibitions of her watercolours and oil paintings for the University community: an account of one, held in October 1929 at the University's museum, noted how the "discouragement resulting from the theft of her valuable collection of originals" had not lowered "the standards of the past."⁷³ When she and her husband departed from China, she donated a dozen of "her lovely pictures to hang in the Assembly Hall and Faculty Common Room in the Administration Building."⁷⁴

There was another Nova Scotian in Chengdu, Annie Alice Fuller Dickinson (1888–1978), the "Mrs. Dickinson" who had worked with Beatrice McDowell Kitchen on the anniversary exhibition. From time to time, and as publicly acknowledged, she would replace Anna Kinney Morse in the Anatomical Drawing classes at the University and in 1932, the two of them joined together with Dr. Lewis C. Walmsley, Principal of the Canadian School for Missionary Children, to give a lecture on Chinese Art.⁷⁵ These activities were supported by her credentials from the art courses offered to students of Mount Allison's Ladies College and University at the Owens Art Gallery.⁷⁶

Fuller Dickinson had arrived in Sichuan in 1913 with her husband, a spirited agricultural missionary for the Methodist Church who would become widely known throughout China and North America for introducing new crops and livestock to West China.⁷⁷ First located at Penghsien, Fuller Dickinson was Acting Mistress at the Mission Boys' School, and student work from her classes helped to shape her 1919 book, *Portfolio of Drawings with Teaching Manual*.⁷⁸ She also became a school examiner in art for the West China Christian Educational Union, judging competitions of drawings and watercolour paintings produced by students from schools throughout the areas of Sichuan where Protestant missionaries were active.⁷⁹ When she and her husband moved to Chengdu, he to take up a University position in Rural Sociology, her commitment to the emphasis on art as a necessary part of education for Chinese children continued.⁸⁰ These official obligations, along with sporadic art teaching alongside Anna Kinney Morse at the Canadian School for Missionary Children, some recorded teaching in mathematics at the University, and at least two lectures for the West China Border Research Society, did not vanquish her own desire to make and exhibit art.⁸¹ Her production was fueled by sketching trips in the countryside or in towns and villages in the region.⁸² Like her friends, McDowell Kitchen and Kinney Morse, Annie Fuller Dickinson has all but vanished from sight, at best known to a few as the individual who, on one of her sketching trips in the late 1930s, initiated the process that led to a panda, Pandora, being sent by her husband to the Bronx Zoo, the first ever received by that institution and a star in its 1939 World's Fair display.⁸³

More life yet needs to be breathed into these Sichuan Canadian women and their engagements with the visual, just as the cultural life of missionary Chengdu requires mapping out in a more three-dimensional manner. Passing references in newspapers and archives to events and activities need to be explored, even though their ephemeral nature would constitute a challenge to researchers were they to have taken place in a major Canadian city let alone many thousands of miles away. Descendants of missionaries should be interviewed, perhaps none more urgently than Dr. Robert Kilborn, grandson of one of the founders of the West China Medical College, private archives consulted, and resources available in Chengdu, where the vestiges of the West China Union University survive in Sichuan University, pored over.⁸⁴ Making such a research project enormously attractive is the opportunity to look deep into the situation of women and art in what was an especially fascinating piece of “Canadian” geography. It was a tiny microcosm of English Canada, but it was also an unusually close and unusually competitive Canadian neighbour of American and British communities, a place where no one was likely to dismiss Canada as a small force in the world. It was a space within which Canadians negotiated relations with various Chinese populations, this at a time when the record at home of such contacts was less than edifying. What can be learned from this rich, “Canadian-Sichuan” locale? How did women, both the three referred to here and others yet to be discussed, fare in terms of acknowledgment and respect for the professional contributions they made to the art-related work of their community, both within formal evangelical/educational systems and within the “cultural” sphere? Did the shared isolation and “privileged” lives of these women flatten out hierarchical social patterns that would have been applied at home? Can a particularly “Canadian” inflection be discerned in the treatment they received or in the roles they were able to carve out for themselves? Is there something to be learned from their interactions with Chinese students and, in the case of McDowell Kitchen, with Chinese employees of the Press, and from whatever exchanges, if any at all, they had with Chengdu’s Chinese artists? The questions to be posed and perhaps answered do not end with these.

In “The Paradox of Gender among West China Missionary Collectors, 1920–1950,” cultural anthropologist Cory Willmott recently reanimated the Chengdu missionary community in the context of its collecting of artifacts.⁸⁵ She documents the regular appearance of curio-dealers who offered their goods – often from Manchu families rendered impoverished through the 1911 overthrow of the Qing dynasty – from the verandas of missionary homes. The rich diversity of approaches to collecting, especially those to be found among Chengdu’s missionary women, is unfolded, and the dynamic relationships of some of these practices to emerging Chinese discourses on nationalism and consumerism are explored, all within a sophisticated

theoretical infrastructure. Although a majority of the individuals, male and female, whose collecting is discussed were Canadian, Willmott frames her discussion within the construct of a multinational missionary community, an understandable perspective even if it has been left largely unexplained. Caution, however, needs to be exercised in extending into other parts of cultural life in Chengdu her conclusion that “gender-specific models,” based on a combination of Western social norms and the missionary-specific mentality of undervaluing the unpaid labour of missionary wives, governed how seriously women’s collecting practices were taken in the Chengdu community and by the broader museum establishment.⁸⁶ Beatrice McDowell Kitchen, Anna Kinney Morse, and Annie Fuller Dickinson, in different ways and to different degrees, appear to have very publicly escaped such wifely cages during their time in China, with “The Press Artist” having been appreciated across a very wide geography, some of her major supporters being from the highest echelons of the United Church of Canada. Perhaps they can also escape onto the pages of fresh accounts of women and art in Canada, pages which continue to break down barriers of all sorts, including reluctance or shyness about looking for Canada and its mutations out and about in the world.

NOTES

- 1 Foreign Missions Photograph Collection, Item 2788, United Church of Canada Archives (UCCA). Sitter information for the photograph is readily amplified through UCCA documents, indexed through the *General Council Archives Guide to the Holdings Related to West China Medical Missions (1800–1950)*, which the UCCA has made available online. Accessed 16 July 2013, http://www.united-church.ca/files/local/archives/on/research-guide_west-china.pdf. The Guide uses Wade-Giles transcription, whereas this article will employ Pinyin transcription throughout, with – as examples – “Chengdu” replacing “Chengtu” and “Huaiyuan” replacing “Hwai Yuen/Hwai Yuan.”
- 2 Leslie G. KILBORN, *The Colossal Conceit of Missionaries* (Toronto: The Committee on Missionary Education for the Board of Overseas Missions, United Church of Canada, 1930), 8.
- 3 “Freedom of Women Risky Experiment, Says Dr. Jolliffe,” *Toronto Globe*, 3 June 1929.
- 4 An early example of such scholarship is Rosemary R. GAGAN, *Sensitive Independence: Canadian Methodist Women Missionaries in Canada and the Orient, 1881–1925* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1992), but the issues it introduced have been taken up again and again in subsequent literature.
- 5 Jesse H. ARNUP, *A New Church Faces a New World* (Toronto: The United Church of Canada, 1937), 202.
- 6 See the Call for Papers for the 2nd Conference of the Canadian Women Artists Initiative. Accessed 16 July 2013, <http://cwahi.concordia.ca/sources/resources/conference-2012.php>

- 7 Alvyn J. AUSTIN, *Saving China: Canadian Missionaries in the Middle Kingdom* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1987). From the literature on denominational energies, an especially pertinent and well-contextualized account of work in China is provided in Neil SEMPLE, *The Lord's Dominion: The History of Canadian Methodism* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996).
- 8 Taylor's striking vision is cited in AUSTIN, *Saving China*, 6. The British-born Taylor (1832–1905) was instrumental, through his formation of the non-denominational China Inland Mission, in flooding China with English-speaking missionaries: see Alfred BROOMHALL, *Hudson Taylor and China's Open Century*, vols. 1–7 (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1982–1989).
- 9 Cheung YUET-WAH, *Missionary Medicine in China: A Study of Two Canadian Protestant Missions in China before 1937* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1988).
- 10 Little scholarly work has been conducted on the Goforths: materials for such exist in the Archives of the Billy Graham Center at Wheaton College in Wheaton, Illinois.
- 11 A somewhat hagiographic account of Bishop White in China is to be found in Lewis C. WALMSLEY, *Bishop in Honan: Mission and Museum in the Life of William C. White* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974).
- 12 SEMPLE, *The Lord's Dominion*, 329.
- 13 Missionary literature on the location of the West China Mission made much of its adjacency to Tibet, as in ARNUP, *A New Church*, 184, who invited readers to “take the wings of your imagination and stand on the mountains of Eastern Tibet . . . near the geographical and population centre of the non-Christian world.” For the reputation of the West China Mission, see Linfu DONG, *Cross Culture and Faith: The Life and Work of James Mellon Menzies* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 2005), 28.
- 14 The dental college founded by Dr. Lindsay survives today as the West China School of Stomatology at Sichuan University. For the Canadian contribution to the sociology program at the University, see Jeff KYONG-McCLAIN, “Making Chengdu ‘The Kingdom of God as Jesus Conceived It’: The Urban Work of West China Union University’s Sociology Department,” *Social Sciences and Missions* 23:2 (2010): 162–86.
- 15 J.C. POLLOCK, *Hudson Taylor and Maria: Pioneers in China* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1962), 31.
- 16 In assessing the career of one of Harriet MacCurdy's nieces, Barbara MEADOWCROFT, *Gwethalyn Graham: A Liberated Woman in a Conventional Age* (Toronto: Three O'Clock Press, 2008), offers tantalizing glimpses of three generations of a Canadian family very much in need of a collective biography. Harriet was born near Leipzig, Germany, while her father – having left his instructor's position at Princeton Theological Seminary for intellectual reasons – was obtaining his doctorate. MCCURDY (a spelling which he seemed to prefer over his daughter's use of MacCurdy) received a teaching position at the University of Toronto in 1885, and became widely known for his three-volume *History, Prophecy and the Monuments* (New York: The MacMillan Co., 1894–1901), which went into a second edition almost immediately after its initial publication. The social position of his family, comprised of his wife, Isabelle Russell, and their four children, is indicated in part by the recording of the women's “at homes” in issues of the *Society Blue Book of Toronto*.
- 17 A brief but very useful account of the Huaiyuan station is to be found in G. THOMPSON BROWN, *Earthen Vessels and Transcendent Power: American Presbyterians in China, 1837–1952* (Marykoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997), 177–78.

- 18 References to MacCurdy's work are to be found in various annual reports emerging from the American Presbyterian Church, and her own description of the evangelical activities in which she took part are to be found in Jeannie C. JENKINS, et al., *Little Glimpses of the Kiangan Mission* (1916), 18–20.
- 19 See BROWN, *Earthen Vessels*, 275, for a brief reference to MacCurdy's role in looking out for those fleeing the Japanese.
- 20 Hattie R. MACCURDY, "The Present Situation: Breaches Healed Between Japan and China," *Chinese Recorder* (December 1937): 766–68.
- 21 The Oxford Group, sometimes called "Buchmanism" after its founder, Frank Buchman, sought to solve international problems through the force of individual spiritual renewal and would startle some with its leader's hopes that Hitler could be converted: for a recent, if somewhat limited consideration of its tenets and impact, see Anders JARLET, *The Oxford Group, Group Revivalism, and the Churches in Northern Europe, 1930–1940* (Lund, Sweden: Lund University Press, 1995). The organization was also controversial for the intensity and focus on sexual issues of the confessional activities that took place at the luxurious house-party gatherings which were tracked by the international press: the session MacCurdy attended in Oxford is referred to in "Oxford Group Meets," *New York Times*, 30 June 1934.
- 22 Mona PURSER, "Find Memories of China in Work With Ceramics," *Globe and Mail*, 14 Dec. 1948. MacCurdy was mentioned in the article as the individual who introduced the writer to one of her Huaiyuan colleagues, Mabel Steele Jones, who had returned home and taken up an assistant curator's position at the Philadelphia Museum of Art.
- 23 Unquestionably the most prominent member of MacCurdy's extended family was Rev. Alexander Gatherer Russell: see obituary in *New York Times*, 12 Nov. 1911. That being said, her cousin once removed, Rev. Robert Haddow, was a key figure in Canadian Presbyterian circles, being editor of *The Presbyterian* from 1900–1925 and of *The United Church Record* from 1926–1931.
- 24 The Sozialen Frauenschule der Inneren Mission had been founded in Berlin by Bertha Gräfin von der Schulenburg in 1909, as part of an attempt to involve educated women in Christian social work: see Sabine HERING and Richard MUNCHEMEIER, *Geschichte der Sozialen Arbeit: eine Einführung* (Weinheim, Germany: Beltz Juventa, 2007), 243.
- 25 Dr. John Thomson MacCurdy, Harriet's younger brother, became as prominent internationally as their father. He was an early researcher into the effects of psychological stress, and helped found the American Psychopathological Association. However, the bulk of his career, which focused on critical studies of psychology, was spent at Cambridge University: "Obituary Notice: John Thomson MacCurdy, 1886–1947," *British Journal of Psychology* 40:1 (September 1941): 1–4.
- 26 MacCurdy claimed to have studied art with Dignam from 1893–1904: see *The Monthly Supplement: a current biographical reference service: A current adjunct to Who's who, Who was who, Who knows, Who's who in commerce and industry (the international business who's who) and the other standard Marquis biographical reference works*, vols. 3–4 (Chicago: A.N. Marquis, 1942–1943), 58. MacCurdy's membership in the Art Students League is listed in a brief notice in *American Art News* 4:3 (28 Oct. 1905): 2.
- 27 "Work of Lady Artists," *Toronto Globe*, 27 Mar. 1901; "Paintings on View Are Interesting," *Montreal Gazette*, 17 Nov. 1903. Her participation in the 1904 Women's

- Art Association exhibition in Ottawa is mentioned in Anson A. GARD, *The Hub and the Spokes; Or, The Capital and its Environs* (Ottawa: The Emerson Press, 1904), 105.
- 28 Held from 4–17 November, the Thumb Box hung two works by MacCurdy – *Sunrise, Queen’s Park* and *The Edge of the Woods* – in a show that also offered art by the likes of Fred S. Haines (1879–1960), Robert Ford Gagen (1847–1926), Gertrude E. Spurr (1858–1941), and Clara S. Hagarty (1871–1958). The small pamphlet for the exhibition is in the Library and Archives of the National Gallery of Canada.
- 29 An invitation to the 7 Oct. WAAC exhibition was issued under “Society News” in *Toronto World*, 4 Oct. 1919.
- 30 For the Touchstone Galleries show see “Soldier, China and Holy Land Seen on Canvas,” *New York Tribune*, 6 Jan. 1920. MacCurdy’s entries for the Society of Independent Artists are documented in Clark S. MARLOR, *The Society of Independent Artists: The Exhibition Record 1917–1944* (Park Ridge, NJ: Noyes Press, 1984), 372.
- 31 Many thanks to Ms. Katy Rawdon, archivist and librarian at the Barnes Foundation in Merion, Pennsylvania, for sending me a copy of the Barnes-MacCurdy file from the Series I – Correspondence, Dates 1902–1951, of the *Correspondence of Albert C. Barnes* holdings, AR.ABC.1925.516. One of the two daughters of Daniel S. Lamont, Elizabeth K. Lamont, from whose residence MacCurdy penned her first request to the foundation, was one of a small number of sustaining members of the Metropolitan Museum and a noted supporter of many cultural initiatives.
- 32 “Attractive Show at W.A.A. Gallery,” *Toronto Globe and Mail*, 17 Oct. 1933.
- 33 Howard DEVREE, “Galleries,” *New York Times*, 25 Feb. 1934.
- 34 A copy of the small exhibition pamphlet constitutes MacCurdy’s entire artist’s file in the library of the Smithsonian Museum of American Art/National Portrait Gallery: many thanks to Mary Wassum, Reference Librarian, for sending a scan. Thirty-one works were included, almost all landscapes from well-known locations in China and Korea.
- 35 “A Reviewer’s Notebook,” *New York Times*, 7 Dec. 1941; “Pastels of China,” *Arts Magazine*, 1 Dec. 1941.
- 36 “An Art Exhibition,” *Shanghai North China Herald*, 17 Mar. 1923.
- 37 The exhibition, which included “a number of lovely Canadian scenes,” was given a brief review in the *Shanghai Sunday Times*, 1 Jan. 1928, under “Women’s Club Notes,” and on a subsequent page two illustrations of her work – *A Daoist Temple* and *In a Confucian Temple* – were provided. For the more enthusiastic review see “A Pleasing Exhibition at B.W.A.: Paintings of Chinese Landscapes By Miss MacCurdy,” *Shanghai North China Herald*, 31 Dec. 1927. A poor reproduction of one of the works from this exhibition can be found at http://www.instappraisal.com/sites/instappraisal/files/appraisal_images/100_0562.jpg (accessed 16 July 2013).
- 38 For insight into this neglected world, albeit focusing on British women’s work, see Catherine MACKENZIE, “Securing Shanghai: British Women Artists and Their City,” in *Travellers and Tourists: Interdisciplinary and Transnational Perspectives on the History of the British Abroad*, ed. Martin Farr and Xavier Guégan (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 159–75.
- 39 See Rev. Wilton Merle SMITH’s introduction to John B. Devins, *On the Way to Hwai Yuen: or The Story of a Mule Ride in China* (New York: The New York Observer, 1905), 5.
- 40 Intersections between the changing nature of North American attitudes towards China in the first half of the twentieth century and the production and reception

of images of China have been considered ever since the publication of Harold ISAACS, *Scratches on Our Minds; American Images of China and India* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1958), a text which itself has gone into at least 24 editions. However, the study of ways in which expatriate production functioned for the displaced communities themselves is very rare. Taking the brief discussion of the function of watercolours made by women in nineteenth-century India in Sara SULERI, *The Rhetoric of English India* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 75–77, as a departure point, my chapter on the expatriate British “art scene” in early twentieth-century Shanghai (see note 38) suggests that many anxieties, general and very particular at times, about distance from the metropolitan centre were addressed through the insistence that “normal” patterns of cultural life could be maintained and, indeed, rendered more important, either intact or with careful modifications, because of the British leadership they could offer to other populations.

- 41 *The Monthly Supplement*, 58.
- 42 “Harriet R. M’Curdy,” *New York Times*, 6 May 1961 and “Harriet R. McCurdy Served in China As Missionary,” *Toronto Globe and Mail*, 6 May 1961.
- 43 MEADOWCROFT, *Gwethalyn Graham*, offers glimpses into the households, while numerous art historical texts refer to the hospitable environment for artists maintained by the Erichsen-Browns. A humorous chalk drawing, by Arthur Lismer of Frank Erichsen-Brown and his distant cousin, entitled *The Jacksons and the Browns – Need Titles (ca. 1932–1935)* is owned by the National Gallery of Canada. Accessed 16 July 2013, <http://www.gallery.ca/en/see/collections/artwork.php?mkey=12082>
- 44 The expanded population in Sichuan was greeted enthusiastically by members of most Christian denominations, who saw it as a chance to impress a concentrated body of Chinese students and intellectuals with the nationalist loyalties of missionaries: see Yi-Fang WU and Frank W. PRICE, ed., *China Rediscovered Her West: A Symposium*, (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1942).
- 45 Beaton’s photographic activities in China were part of an assignment for the British Ministry of Information as a war photographer, the project leading to, among other things, Cecil BEATON, *Chinese Album* (London: B.T. Batsford, 1945). For references to the work the press was doing for the British Ministry of Information see John Kitchen to J.H. Arnup, Papers of the Board of Overseas Missions Associate Secretary Relating to West China (1925–1952), fonds 502, 1983.0473, box 9, file 220, United Church of Canada Board of Overseas Missions fonds 1910–1965, UCCA. The proceeds from this work were helping the press in its literature work.
- 46 Information on Beatrice McDowell’s birthplace (St. Thomas, Ontario) and her parents, William and Idella McDowell, has largely been drawn from census data accessed through Ancestry.com, a source which has also been invaluable in tracking the ocean travel of all of the women mentioned in this text.
- 47 “Tilbury,” *Comber Herald* (Ontario), 1 May 1913. Census data from 1911 indicates that she was living in that city as an “artist.” The institutions where she trained have not yet been confirmed.
- 48 Emily FOSTER, *The Banquet: My Grandma’s Memories of China* (New York: iUniverse, 2008), 7. In recording the thoughts of her grandmother, Muriel Tonge, Foster makes infrequent references to her great-grandmother, Beatrice McDowell Kitchen, and reproduces a print and sketch.

- 49 The son of a fisherman, John Kitchen, born in Porthleven, Cornwall, England, in 1894, had immigrated to the United States in 1913 and had then decided to take up religious training, which he completed in 1920 through Wesley College in Winnipeg. The decision to leave for China may have been last minute: F.C. STEPHENSON, ed., *Our West China mission: being a somewhat extensive summary by the missionaries on the field of work during the first twenty-five years of the Canadian Methodist mission in the province of Szechwan, Western China* (Toronto: Missionary Society of the Methodist Church and the Young People's Forward Movement, 1920), n.p., offers photographs of most of the new missionary personnel, but notes that photographs were not yet available for the Kitchens.
- 50 Founded by the missionary, Rev. Virgil Hart, who first took Canadian Methodists into Sichuan, the Press and the details of its operations were described with pride in church publications in China: see, for example, *Our West China mission*, 412–23. The section incorporates a group photograph of staff members (419), some of whom would have been involved in printing texts in the “tribal languages” with alphabets “based on the Cree syllabic developed by James Evans for the Indians of Canada”: United Church of Canada, *Forward with China: The Story of the Missions of the United Church of Canada in China* (Toronto: The Committee on Literature, General Publicity and Missionary Education, 1928), 272.
- 51 The subject of salaries for married missionaries is discussed, rather painfully, in a 14 June 1947 letter written by John Kitchen to Rt. Rev. Jessie H. Arnup in Toronto after the death of his wife: Fonds 502, 1983.0473, box 11, file 285, UCCA. His salary was subsequently reduced by a small amount as he was now treated as a single man.
- 52 An anti-opium image from *Christian Hope*, identified as “a drawing from Mrs. Kitchen,” was borrowed for *West China Missionary News* 37:1 (January 1925): n.p. to underscore the issue’s focus on the new Anti-Opium Crusade.
- 53 The “Pictures for Sunday Schools drawn by Mrs. Kitchen in Chengdu” are from the SOAS Archives Collection of William Gawan Sewell, a missionary from the London-based Society of Friends who was in Chengdu for large periods of time from 1924–1942: PP MS 16, 06.04, SOAS Archives.
- 54 The Sunday School work is mentioned in a letter from John Kitchen to James Endicott, 27 Jan. 1932, indicating that 14,000 of these valuable coloured Lesson Helps were being used each week “in the various churches and Sunday Schools of West China” and efforts would be made to double that number: see fonds 502, 1983.0473, box 4, file 76, UCCA. See also Kenneth J. BEATON, *Serving with the Sons of Shuh: Fifty Fateful Years in West China* (Toronto: United Church of Canada, Committee on Missionary Education, 1941), 184: “For the outsiders, there is every Sunday, a single sheet printed on Chinese paper and illustrated with one of Mrs. Kitchen’s drawings. Tens of thousands of these leaflets go into *Chinese* homes every week.” In the January 1932 letter, Kitchen states that the Press had also distributed over 750,000 Gospel Tracts, many illustrated by “Mrs. Kitchen,” as part of a turn toward “Direct Evangelism.”
- 55 The increase of work for the Press is documented in a lively letter, 29 Oct. 1943, from John Kitchen to J.H. Arnup, fonds 502, 1983.0473, box 9, file 220, UCCA. Ruth URE, *The Highway of Print: A World-Wide Study of the Production and Distribution of Christian Literature* (New York: The Friendship Press, 1946), 71, comments on the importance of the *Christian Farmer* for raising both practical and spiritual concerns

in rural areas, with a readership, based on the sharing of subscriptions, given as 750,000.

- 56 Cheng TE-K'UN, *Archaeological Studies in Szechwan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1957), 18, acknowledges the value of drawings provided for a paper published by J. Hutson Edgar, one of the missionaries who pioneered Western explorations of prehistoric sites in Sichuan.
- 57 The image was used in KILBORN, *Colossal Conceit*, 2, and in Kenneth J. BEATON, *The Making of a Missionary* (Toronto: The Committee on Missionary Education, The United Church of Canada, 1945), 5.
- 58 Woodcut translations of these drawings appeared regularly in the *West China Missionary News* from November 1921 through November 1924. My gratitude to Rajee Jejihergill, a Concordia MA student, for reading through the WCMN for references to art and artists in Chengdu.
- 59 The publication of *Toilers of China* was announced in the *West China Missionary News* 25:5 (May 1923): 30.
- 60 *Ibid.*, 31:11 (November 1924): 43.
- 61 Mabel NOWLIN, "Modern China," *International Journal of Religious Education* 12 (November 1935): 43.
- 62 For a large selection of Willcox-Smith images of children see Gene MITCHELL, *The Subject Was Children: The Art of Jessie Willcox Smith* (New York: Dutton, 1979).
- 63 Once much appreciated by North America audiences, the prints of the Americans Helen Hyde and Bertha Lum have become known again through small but lavishly illustrated publications by the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, DC. Popular as well both in China and on the east coast of the United States was the production of Elizabeth Otis Dunn (1888–1956), a Philadelphia Academy of Fine Arts graduate who lived with her architect husband in China from 1916–1927 and again from 1932–1937. She exhibited and sold work in Shanghai and Beijing, and during her five-year hiatus back in the United States found buyers for her watercolours of "Chinese babies": see "Eleven Paintings in AWA Show Sold," *AWA [American Woman's Association] Bulletin*, 21 Apr. 1932, 1, which documents the high level of sales of these images through the New York-based Association at one of its many Clubhouse exhibitions. For a very rare published acknowledgment of Dunn's production, see Katerina LAGASSÉ, "Cultural Housekeepers: Elizabeth Otis Dunn and American Women's Organizations in Early Twentieth Century China and America," *Concordia Undergraduate Journal of Art History* 8 (2012), one of several papers from a 2012 Concordia University undergraduate seminar on Euro-American artists in China. Accessed 16 July 2013, <http://cujah.org/past-volumes/volume-viii/essay-9-volume-8/>
- 64 A copy of this very rare foldout of images, printed by the Canadian Mission Press in Chengdu "on whose staff Mrs. Kitchen served," is in the library of the Toronto United Church of Canada Archives facilities. My deepest gratitude goes to McDowell Kitchen's daughter, Muriel Tonge, for discussing with me the circumstances of her mother's death.
- 65 Kenneth J. BEATON, *West of the Gorges* (Toronto: The United Church of Canada, 1948), 133: interestingly enough, Beaton's comments were part of a two-page text entitled "The Press Artist." Beaton's acknowledgment of McDowell Kitchen across several of his publications may have been related to his interest in using different mediums to reach populations: see "Rev. Kenneth J. Beaton: Used New Media in United Church Mission Work," *Toronto Globe and Mail*, 21 Oct. 1957.

- 66 "Missionary to Chinese Bible Story Illustrator," *Toronto Globe and Mail*, 15 June 1946.
- 67 Jane TURNER, "Exhibition of Christian Art in Chengtu," *West China Missionary News* 43:11 (November–December 1941): 352–54.
- 68 Two letters from Dr. Bridgman were received in October and November 1999; my resistance to move into ecclesiastical terrain, to add the women she mentioned into the mix of secular women artists who spent time in China, was finally overcome by the CWAHI Call for Papers and by watching, from afar, the intellectual work of Sharon Murray, a graduate student at Concordia University who is investigating photographic representations of India created by Canadian Baptist overseas missionaries.
- 69 The fullest account I have found of Anna Kinney Morse's life is a one-paragraph obituary that appeared in the *Yearbook of the American Baptist Convention* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1952), 38–39. It does not explain how the daughter of what census data describes as a "grocer" ended up in New York for education. Sadly, I have been unable to find references to the artwork she is alleged to have made after she returned from China, first to the United States and then to Nova Scotia.
- 70 Kinney Morse organized a three-hour exhibition, held in the University's Administration Building, for the West China Border Research Society in September 1933, the exact nature of which I have yet to discover: *Journal of the West China Border Research Society* 5 (1932): n.p.
- 71 As was the case with many, though not all of his confreres, Morse was very open about the affiliation of his medical skills and his religious beliefs in a "universal brotherhood": "At our Medical School we, as true ambassadors, carry the Golden Cross of Christianity, the emblem of a religion of love, expressing a philosophy of helping others." See William Reginald MORSE, *The Three Crosses in the Purple Mists* (Shanghai: Mission Book Co., 1928), ii.
- 72 *Ibid.*, 223 and 300, also documents Kinney Morse's part-time teaching at the University.
- 73 The exhibition is referred to in the *West China Missionary News* 31:10 (October 1929): 34.
- 74 *Ibid.*, 35:5 (May 1934): 24.
- 75 *Journal of the West China Border Research Society* 5 (1932): n.p.
- 76 I am extremely grateful to David Mawhinney, University Archivist, Mount Allison University, for the information he uncovered concerning Annie Fuller's education. For details about her family, in which medical training was to be found in abundance, census data has been invaluable.
- 77 A long overdue assessment of Frank Dickinson's impact on agriculture in China could be well serviced by fonds 502, UCCA, which is replete with blunt letters outlining his creative projects. Together, the Dickinsons were celebrated for their international hospitality: a photograph (Fig. 11) of them entertaining "American soldiers at ease" in Chengdu can be found in the *New York Times*, 11 Mar. 1943.
- 78 The announcement of her publication, Mrs. F. DICKINSON, *Portfolio of Drawings, with Teacher's Manual* (Penghsien, 1919) was made in the *West China Missionary News* 21:2 (February 1919): 30.
- 79 *Ibid.* Unhappily, in his recent chapter on "Wallace of West China: Edward Wilson Wallace and the Canadian Educational Systems of China, 1906–1927," Alwyn J. AUSTIN does not discuss the importance of training in the art of drawing in the systems: see *Canadian Missionaries, Indigenous Peoples: Representing Religion at Home*



11 | “US soldiers are warming themselves by the fire of a home in Chengtu, China [Fuller Dickinson with hand on mantle],” Associated Press photograph 430309052, used in *New York Times* of 11 March 1942. (Photo: © Associated Press)

and Abroad, ed. Alwyn J. Austin and Jamie S. Scott (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 111–33. Yet the pages of the *West China Missionary News* make a clear case for its significance, with numerous reports of primary and secondary school level competitions and exhibitions.

- 80 Fuller Dickinson’s chairship of the Standing Committee on Drawing of the West China Christian Educational Union is recorded in the *West China Missionary News* 37:1 (January 1925): 44.
- 81 For her teaching at the Canadian School, see *The Canadian School – West China News* 4:2 (June 1968): 19, an amateur publication held by the Library of the UCCA in Toronto. One of her lectures for the Research Society was entitled “Some Researchers I have Known” (see *West China Missionary News* 33:4 [1931]: 43), suggesting she was not restricted to an “artistic” sphere in her public performances.
- 82 I have as yet been unable to access reproductions of sufficient quality for publication, but small digital images graciously sent to me by Dr. Robert Kilborn indicate that land and templescapes were probably the major focus of Fuller Dickinson’s work, placing her firmly in the company of MacCurdy and Kinney Morse.
- 83 For one of the accounts of Fuller Dickinson’s involvement in the acquisition of the panda, see Ramona MORRIS and Desmond MORRIS, *Men and Pandas* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1967), 90.
- 84 Dr. Robert Kilborn is the grandson of Rev. Leslie G. Kilborn and has family connections to a large number of other Chengdu residents. His project to document artistic work from Chengdu in private Canadian missionary family collections is exciting. His concerns are inclusive of male producers, of whom Dr. Lewis C. Walmsley is the principal figure, but his knowledge of missionary life in Chengdu is of utmost value.
- 85 Cory WILLMOTT, “The Paradox of Gender among West China Missionary Collectors, 1920–1950,” *Social Sciences and Missions* 25 (2012): 129–65.
- 86 *Ibid.*, 164.

« C'est toute une histoire » : les artistes canadiennes missionnaires en Chine

CATHERINE MACKENZIE

L'ampleur de l'enthousiasme canadien pour l'évangélisation du monde vers la fin du XIX^e siècle et le début du XX^e a, depuis que des recherches sérieuses ont été entamées dans les années 1970, poussé les intellectuels à s'intéresser aux missions chinoises. De nombreux groupes protestants avaient détaché des missions importantes en Chine – notamment celle qui est devenue la Methodist West China Mission à Chengdu. Certaines de ces antennes étaient habitées par des artistes canadiennes dotées d'une formation professionnelle. Les missions américaines et britanniques s'étaient installées avant leurs contreparties canadiennes, mais une poignée d'artistes canadiennes vivaient dans leur entourage. Beatrice McDowell Kitchen (1887–1947) et Harriet Russell MacCurdy (1883–1961) ouvrent les portes de l'existence encore largement méconnue de ces femmes qui évoluaient dans le milieu des missions. Plutôt que d'examiner comment la Chrétienté canadienne a employé ces femmes à des tâches religieuses spécifiques ou les a façonnées comme modèles pour la « modernisation » des attitudes chinoises envers les femmes, notre article se concentre sur leur production artistique selon la perspective de l'histoire de l'art, soutenant leur intégration dans les histoires de l'art créé par des femmes canadiennes.

En poste de 1913 à 1941 à Huaiyuan, MacCurdy enseigne à des étudiantes de l'école biblique de la ville, faisant du prosélytisme lors de rassemblements de femmes dans de minuscules villages disséminés dans toute la région. Elle est si bien considérée comme éducatrice qu'elle remplace le directeur en congé de la Bible Teachers Training School for Women à Nanjing, de 1930 à 1931. Déléguée à divers rassemblements religieux en Chine, elle relate dans ses écrits les activités des missionnaires de Huaiyuan et les conditions générales de vie en Chine. Parallèlement à ses activités missionnaires, MacCurdy est aussi une artiste. Elle a d'ailleurs été associée à Mary Ella Dignam et à la Women's Art Association of Canada (WAAC) depuis son adolescence. Elle poursuit occasionnellement ses études à l'Université de Toronto et passe une année à l'Art Students League de New York (1905–1906). En 1909, elle accepte un poste de professeure d'art au Westminster Ladies College de Toronto, poste qui va s'avérer temporaire. Elle jouit alors d'un dossier d'expositions

qui s'étend sur plusieurs années, couvre trois villes canadiennes (Toronto, Montréal et Ottawa) et est agréablement étayé de critiques favorables. Au cours de ses congés ultérieurs de Chine au Canada, elle continue à exposer à la fois au Canada et aux États-Unis.

On pourrait supposer que MacCurdy se considère surtout comme une missionnaire qui fait de la peinture à temps perdu, comme loisir, mais ce n'est guère le cas ; elle conserve deux identités professionnelles. En plus de ces expositions en Amérique du Nord, elle participe à des expositions en groupe avec la Shanghai British Women's Association, et fait une exposition en solo qui présente plus d'une centaine d'œuvres à Shanghai en 1927. Elle illustre des temples, des canaux à la vénitienne, des sites de pèlerinage populaires et des paysages. En Chine comme en Amérique du Nord, la réponse à son œuvre a été conforme à ce à quoi il fallait s'attendre dans les sociétés séculières : une normalisation de ce qui est « étranger » pour les expatriés et un engouement pour cette lointaine Chine, pour ceux qui ne pouvaient pas visiter ce lieu de fascination.

McDowell Kitchen a probablement été la créatrice d'images la plus prolifique du début des années 1920 au milieu des années 1940, attirant de nombreux admirateurs. Formée en art commercial à Toronto et à Chicago, elle entame vers 1911 ce qui a été décrit comme une brillante carrière en tant qu'illustratrice et caricaturiste à Vancouver. En 1918, elle épouse John Kitchen et peu après, tous deux partent comme missionnaires en Chine où ils contribuent à la presse de la Mission (méthodiste) canadienne de Chengdu. Vers 1920, la presse publie chaque mois 3,5 millions de pages de textes religieux. Beatrice McDowell Kitchen commence vite à créer un énorme portfolio d'œuvres visuelles, presque toujours signées de son nom ou de l'initiale « K » pour la presse et ses clients. Elle illustre le nouveau mensuel en langue chinoise *Christian Hope*, offrant à la fois des perspectives picturales sur le pays et des images à l'appui d'activités pointues comme la campagne contre l'opium. Elle produit des dessins pour des petits tracts sur la religion ou la santé distribués dans toute la région, pour des livrets d'enfants et pour des affiches lithographiques en quatre ou cinq couleurs, imprimées à Shanghai avant 1940 et utilisées par les missionnaires quand ils faisaient leur présentation dans les marchés. Dès 1931, l'évangélisme mettant de plus en plus l'accent sur le visuel, elle s'attèle sans relâche à créer des images pour l'enseignement à l'école du dimanche. Heureusement, un grand nombre de ces images ont survécu. C'étaient des dessins simples, charmants, créés pour « plaire à l'esprit des jeunes » et parfaitement au diapason des valeurs sociales encouragées par les missionnaires.

McDowell Kitchen produit aussi des illustrations pour *The Christian Farmer*, importante publication en chinois sur la ferme progressiste, pour

le journal interconfessionnel *West China Missionary News*, ainsi que pour le *Journal of the West China Border Research Society*. Ses œuvres paraissent également dans un nombre de livres écrits par des missionnaires canadiens et certains de ses dessins ont plutôt été utilisés comme images de photothèque. En 1923, une collection de ses dessins est publiée sous le titre de *Toilers of China*, et un an après, d'autres dessins sont rassemblés dans *Chinese Children: Pen and Ink Sketches from Chinese Life*. Après sa mort, une petite brochure, *For Such is the Kingdom of Heaven*, est publiée à titre commémoratif. À cette époque, c'est une artiste reconnue en Chine, et même si elle n'a jamais exposé au Canada, son œuvre est connue d'un grand nombre de Canadiens qui suivent les activités des missionnaires.

Contrairement à MacCurdy, MacDowell Kitchen n'est pas la seule femme artiste canadienne dans son lieu de mission, mais elle est presque certainement la créatrice la plus prolifique de tout ce groupe de femmes qui comprend notamment Anna Crosse Kinney Morse (1875–1951). Diplômée de l'Acadia Seminary à Wolfville en Nouvelle-Écosse, Beatrice McDowell reçoit une formation poussée en art du New York City's Cooper Union. Elle vit à Chengdu de 1916 à 1937, où elle aide son mari, professeur d'anatomie, dans ses tâches administratives et dans l'organisation des séances de la West China Border Research Society, qu'il a fondée. Trois de ses pastels figurent dans son livre de 1928, *The Three Crosses in the Purple Mists*. Elle enseigne aussi le dessin anatomique et d'autres arts à la West China Union University.

Bon nombre de femmes artistes missionnaires canadiennes restent à découvrir et à étudier. Ainsi, de nombreuses pistes demeurent encore inexploitées. Considérant Chengdu comme une importante « enclave canadienne » dans la Chine profonde, nous devons intensifier la recherche pour tirer au clair si les femmes étaient réellement reconnues et respectées pour leurs contributions professionnelles au travail artistique de leur communauté. L'isolement partagé et la vie « privilégiée » de ces femmes ont-ils aplani les modèles sociaux hiérarchiques qui se seraient appliqués dans leur patrie? Peut-on discerner une inflexion particulièrement « canadienne » dans le traitement qu'elles ont reçu ou dans le rôle qu'elles se sont donné? Y a-t-il quelques leçons à tirer de leurs interactions avec les élèves de Chine et dans le cas de McDowell Kitchen, avec les employés de la presse, et de quelques échanges – si échanges il y a eu – qu'elles auraient eues avec les artistes chinois de Chengdu? Les questions à poser et auxquelles il faudra peut-être répondre ne s'arrêtent pas là. Ces questions pourraient se répercuter sur les pages abondant de nouveaux récits de femmes dans les arts au Canada, pages qui continuent de défoncer des barrières de toutes sortes, notamment la répugnance ou la gêne à examiner le Canada et ses mutations partout dans le monde.