



Untitled - P1687

Untitled - P1699



FIRST SON PORTRAITS BY C.D. HOY Curated by Faith Moosang

tour schedule **September 4 – October 17, 1999** Presentation House Gallery, North Vancouver **March 16 – May 21, 2000** Art Gallery of Greater Victoria **June 8 – July 16, 2000** Seattle Art Museum **July 29 – September 24, 2000** Kelowna Art Gallery **January 14 – April 1, 2001** Winnipeg Art Gallery **April 13 – June 3, 2001** MacKenzie Art Gallery, Regina **June 16 – August 19, 2001** Art Gallery of Hamilton **September 6 – November 11, 2001** Campbell River Museum **December 1, 2001 – January 13, 2002** Southern Alberta Art Gallery, Lethbridge **February 1 - to September 3, 2002** Canadian Museum of Civilization, Hull, Quebec **October 1, 2002 - January 17, 2003** Whyte Museum of the Canadian Rockies, Banff **September 25 – November 8, 2003** Sir Wilfred Grenfell College Art Gallery, Corner Brook **August 26, 2004 – May 1, 2005** The McCord Museum of Canadian History, Montreal **July - September, 2005** Evergreen Cultural Centre, Coquitlam, B.C.

C.D. Hoy with Josephine Alexander - P1972



PORTRAITS FROM THE CARIBOO

C.D. HOY

Possibly the Elkins brothers with Willie Long Johnnie - P2025





Left to right: Jerry Boyd, Captain Mark Mack, John Lazzarin, Chief Michel, unknown Chinese man, Moffat Harris, Chief Morris Molize. P1887

INTRODUCTION Chow Dong Hoy lived in the Interior of British Columbia from 1905 until his death in 1973. He learned to take photographs in Barkerville in 1909, and in 1911 became Quesnel's first professional photographer. Hoy took 1,500 portraits of people who lived in and around Quesnel. His archive documents the Native, Chinese and Caucasian peoples of the Cariboo in the early 20th century. After 1973, Hoy's negatives remained in his son's basement for fifteen years, when they passed to his daughter-in-law, Gerri Hoy, who mentioned them to Leah Hubensky of Barkerville Historic Town. Hubensky recognized the importance of the Hoy collection and helped to arrange its transfer to the public archives at Barkerville Historic Town in 1990.

THE PHOTOGRAPHS Although C.D. Hoy began taking portraits in the town of Barkerville, most were taken in Quesnel, where he set up camera and darkroom on the premises of the C.D. Hoy and Company Dry Goods Store. Studio portraiture was an important money-making sideline for Hoy in the early years, but as his main business became more demanding, he stopped photography to concentrate on expanding his store. Hoy's photographic career, had certainly ended by 1924, as his daughter, Evelyn, who was six years old then has no recollection of his photographic studio in use.¹

Hoy's significance as a Chinese photographer goes beyond the fact that he was possibly only the third Chinese photographer to work in British Columbia. He was also the first town photographer in Quesnel, and the only one there at the time. As Edna Mitchell, a ninety-eight-year-old Quesnel pioneer, said to me: "He was our photographer and everyone went to him."²

During this time, it would appear that Native people rarely engaged the services of professional photographers for the purpose of having their portraits taken. There was at least one Native photographer in the

Cariboo; his name was Thrift Meldrum, and his few existing images are evidence that Native people in the Chilcotin region went to him for family portraits. Information about Thrift Meldrum is scant, although it is known that his photographic business was active during the early 1900s and ended when he became blind.³

OLD WORLD INFLUENCES Many of the images in the Hoy collection in Barkerville demonstrate the influence that traditional Chinese portraiture had on Hoy's practice. When photography arrived in China in the middle of the 19th century, the Chinese quickly adapted Western modes of portraiture to their traditional conventions, based on a particular understanding of the codes of representation. In an issue of *The Photographic News* published in London in 1884, D.K. Griffith, who managed a photographic firm in Hong Kong,⁴ noted some of what he called the "peculiarities" of Chinese photographic portraiture:

*"A direct front face must be taken, so as to show both his ears, and each side of his face of the same proportions; both feet must be arranged so that they are of equal length, perspective being no reasoning power with a China-man. The hands are next arranged so as, if possible to show each finger distinctly."*⁵

Many of Hoy's portraits of Chinese men and families adhere to this strict code. Hands are often predominant in Hoy's formal Chinese portraits. His portraits tend towards full-length or three-quarter-length representations, with the sitter directly facing the camera in a rigid or upright posture. In the case of the men, their legs are often triangulated with their hands either spread out on their knees or resting on their laps.

Hoy could not afford the costly magnesium powder photographers used (by exploding it) to illuminate dark interiors, and he had instead to depend on long exposures and a wide f-stop setting on his camera to take portraits indoors. Evidence of these technical constraints are found throughout Hoy's images in the blurring of small children unable to keep still, and in the shallow depth of field, which placed the body of the sitter in sharp focus while consigning the tips of their shoes to an unfocused plane. Hoy achieved remarkable results with the technology he could afford, but nevertheless his long exposures required a certain facial composure on the part of his sitters.

Early Chinese portrait photographers borrowed heavily from both Western and Eastern practice. The strong frontality, full-length representations and static posture found in ancestral portraiture is everywhere evident in the work of Chinese photographers from this time, as it is in Hoy's work. Because the inclusion of props and backdrops has little precedent in either high or low Chinese portrait art, it is safe to say that this was where the West's influence was most strongly felt. In Western photographic portraits subjects were often placed before elegant backdrops and architectural props that lent dignity and sometimes grandeur to the sitter. Chinese pho-

tographers worked to the same ends with a complex and symbolic array of props that were distinctly Eastern in their meaning.

Among Hoy's photographs are many that portray men singly and in groups sitting beneath banners bearing Chinese slogans such as "The Republican Political Party," "by 1912 we swear to eliminate the barbarians," and "after 1914 we push out ———" (this phrase is obscured by the shoulder of a man). Smaller writing on the right and left of the banners reads, "To all comrades of the Republican Party" and "your brother Chew inscribes." These banners would have been made by members of the CKT or Chinese Freemasons. Chinese old-timers from the Cariboo were able to identify Freemasons for me in Hoy's photographs by the little buttons worn on lapels and caps. However, Hoy's children say that their father was not an overtly political man, although he thought of himself as someone who always wanted the best for China.

A CARNIVAL ATMOSPHERE Hoy often included both Caucasian and Native people in his stylized Chinese settings, and many of his Chinese sitters are portrayed without the benefit of a Chinese setting at all, often in a manner that can almost be termed casual. Hoy used conventions, but neither he nor his sitters were wedded to the conventions of Western or Eastern portraiture. One gets the sense that if the elaborate Chinese backdrop happened to be set up when a Native or Caucasian person wanted their picture taken, Hoy would just as soon slip them into the unfamiliar symbolic terrain rather than change the backdrop.

While Hoy was not an itinerant or a carnival photographer, his images do have the feeling of being quickly constructed. Sometimes he didn't clear out the debris in the foreground or in the margins of his makeshift settings. Nor did he hide the fact that his genteel "interior" Chinese backdrops were often set up outdoors, between the log wall of his store and his woodpile. Often the peripheries of his photographs tell more about life in a frontier town than the subjects themselves.

The carnival atmosphere in many of these portraits reflects the fact that Hoy's services as a photographer were most in demand during Quesnel's annual Dominion Day Stampede, which was a huge event, attracting people from hundreds of miles away. Jim Webster, a rancher who passed away in 1998, told me stories of the stampede when he was a small boy. He and his family lived on a ranch on the west side of the Fraser River south of Quesnel and he remembered how excited he was when he saw the first of the wagons that were heading to the Dominion Day celebrations:

*"Now when the Stampede was on in Quesnel, the road in front of the ranch was full of wagon after wagon taking Chilcotins up to the races. Those Chilcotins, they were great riders and great sportsmen. They'd stop in at the house to get this and get that and shoe their horses, because they knew we had tons of shoes lying around. Dad would give them stuff and sometimes he would trade with them. This happened every year."*⁶

This explains why so many of the Native people in Hoy’s photographs were from the Chilcotin area. They, like everyone else in the town, were affected by the lively spirit of the celebrations, and came to see Hoy in groups—as families, friends and lovers—to have their pictures of remembrance taken. The Chinese community was included in these western-style events. Chinese people from around the Cariboo came to Quesnel and convened in the Nugget Café, where they pitched in to get ready for the celebrations.⁷

A CULTURE OF PREJUDICE The structures of racism and cultural bigotry that were so evident in the urban populations of British Columbia (and the rest of Canada) in the early years of the century were not so apparent in Quesnel and most of the Cariboo, where smaller populations and fierce living conditions seem to have had an ameliorating effect on the pressures of cultural prejudice. In a time of head taxes, restrictive immigration policies, unfair labour practices and anti-Chinese riots in the cities, Quesnel’s newspaper, the *Cariboo Observer*, reported on the Chinese community in a dignified way, and never employed derogatory terms such as were to be found in the Barkerville newspaper during the gold rush years (1865-1875). The ratio of Chinese people to Caucasian people was larger in Barkerville than it was in Vancouver at this time. In the Quesnel paper, individuals are invariably identified either by their full names or, when anonymous, as “Chinese residents” or “Chinese labourers” of Quesnel. On February 4, 1911, the newspaper lauds the Chinese custom of paying off old debts to welcome the Chinese New Year, and suggests that the “Occidentals” take note of this fine idea and practice it themselves.

The obituary pages of *The Cariboo Observer* offer further evidence of the respect in which the Chinese community was held in Quesnel, and that the passing of many Chinese was mourned by the community at large. The funerals of Chew Sing (a popular man whose pallbearers included the local MP, the president of the Board of Trade, a barrister and a bank manager), Chew Lai Keen, Chow Fook Gouie, Chow Kai Sen, Chew Sing, Kong Sing, Kong Sue Hoy and Chow Dong Hoy, among others, were as well attended as the funerals of Caucasian people in Quesnel.

Quesnel was not by any means a big city or even a big town in the early years. In 1913, when Hoy was operating his photographic studio, 521 Caucasians lived in Quesnel, and forty-three Chinese,⁸ a number too small to lead to the ghettoizing of the population as happened in Vancouver and Victoria, and in Barkerville when the population there at its peak was 6,000, half of which were Chinese.

Hoy’s second trip to China, to bring his wife over to Canada in 1917, came about when a government agent named Edgar Lunn,⁹ anticipating that the government was planning to impose an Exclusion Act (which happened in 1923), convinced him to go, and guaranteed the bank loan that made the trip possible.¹⁰

Judges and policemen in the town ate in the back of the Nugget Café almost every night with Chow Fook Goie, who was one of the owners of the restaurant. Fook Goie was known informally as the town historian whose memory was often called upon to settle debates. Albert Gong, a waiter at the Nugget Café in Quesnel in the 1930s, suggested to me that the camaraderie between Chinese and Caucasians in the Cariboo was not restricted to the actions of a few people. He had lived in the Lower Mainland before moving to the Cariboo and his experiences with Caucasian people in Vancouver and Victoria were not always pleasant.

NATIVE PEOPLE IN THE PHOTOGRAPHIC RECORD Most photographs of Native people in early British Columbia were taken by European newcomers with very particular points of view: professional photographers, anthropologists and men in the employ of various government sectors, each with their own idea of the proper place and representation of Native people.

The earliest photographs of Native people in British Columbia were taken in the 1860s by professional photographers for large and growing markets in Eastern North America and Europe. Images of Indians were highly collectible as *cartes-de-visite* throughout the 1860s and 1870s, favoured subjects of which were stage actors, royalty and the “Noble Savage.”¹¹

Early representations of Native people tended to associate them with the landscape, which they were perceived to be part of; this is the same as finding them invisible as people. The idea of the Native as wilderness is found everywhere in the Annual Reports and Bulletins of the Geological Survey of Canada and the Canadian Department of Mines.¹² The primary mandate of these institutions was the discovery of, and reporting on, the natural formations of the country; both became repositories of numerous studies of Native people encountered in the cataloguing of Canada’s resources. In these studies, one discovers that Native people were as easily measured as lakes and valleys. The Geological Survey of Canada, oddly enough, even had a branch named the Division of Anthropology.¹³

Edward Curtis was working on Vancouver Island inventing a visual record of a noble and pre-photographic past among the Nuu-chah-nulth and Kwakwaka’wakw people at the same time that Hoy was being paid by Carrier and Tsilhqot’in families to have their portraits taken. Hoy’s work is entirely outside of the conventions of pictorialism, and it is possible that he was unaware of them. The frank, open look on the people’s faces in Hoy’s portraits, and the lack of romanticism in the setting and light effects, reveal the difference between being photographed for someone else’s story and being photographed for your own. None of Hoy’s Native people are positioned as degraded Indians, Noble Savages or good Christian converts. They are friends, families, lovers and individuals. Their anonymity comes from the very human process of forgetting names, not from a rendering of an Indian type whose name was secondary to a perceived symbolic worth. The only strain of romanticism that we

can discover in Hoy’s images is what we as modern viewers bring to them, for the passing of time eventually makes all photographs exotic, and therefore “symbolic.”

Hoy’s photographs of Carrier and Tsilhqot’in people take on added importance when we realize that they are in fact the largest extant and publicly accessible record of Interior Native people in the whole of British Columbia. The same is true of his photographs of Chinese miners, shopkeepers, farmers and freight-carriers, whose continuing viability in Canada was cut short by imposition of the Exclusion Act, which banned immigration from China from 1923 until 1947. If it were not for Hoy and his camera, these people would have been excluded from the photographic record, and would be largely invisible to our cultural memory.

Hoy’s photographs were intended for the families and friends of the people who came before his lens; they were never meant to be seen in a gallery setting. Their first importance as private documents is today overshadowed by their new importance as artistic and social documents. The transition from private to public complicates the “place” of the photographs by introducing them to an anonymous audience, who turn a necessarily “ethnographic” gaze upon them. This is the gaze that most of us will bring to these images, a gaze that drops away as we learn to contextualize these photographs, and in so doing, find a way to renegotiate the terrain of Canadian historical photography. The Hoy archive stands as a celebration of the people we find in it, and of a remarkable man and a great photographer.

Faith Moosang

FOOTNOTES

- 1 — Conversation with Evelyn Sing on May 10, 1997.

2 — Conversation with Edna Mitchell on March 10, 1999.

3 — Conversation with Betty Meldrum on April 25, 1999.

4 — *Imperial China: Photographs 1850-1912* (U.S.A.: C. Pennwick Publishing, 1978), p.260.

5 — *The Photographic News*, London, February 9, 1884, p.129.

6 — Conversation with Jim Webster on September 26, 1998.

7 — Conversation with Albert Gong on April 16, 1997.

8 — *Louis Lebourdais* (PABC) ADD MSS 676, Vol.10, Folder 11.

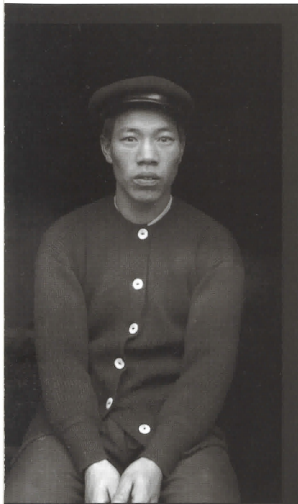
9 — *A Tribute to the Past: Quesnel and Area 1808-1928* (Quesnel: Old Age Pensioners’ Organization, Branch #77, 1985), p.324.

10 — Although Lunn didn’t arrive in Quesnel until 1918, according to one
- source, Hoy’s family says that the timing of this story is correct because their father went back to China in 1917 to bring his wife to Cariboo.

11 — Margaret Blackman, “Studio Indians: Cartes de visite of Native People in British Columbia, 1862-1872” in *Archivaria* 21, Winter 1985-86, p.68.

12 — See George Mercer Dawson, *Notes on the Indian Tribes of the Yukon District and Adjacent Northern Portion of British Columbia Annual Report of the Geological Survey of Canada*, 191 B-213B, 1887, and J.C. Boileau Grant, *Anthropometry of the Beaver, Sekani and Carrier Indians*, Canadian Department of Mines National Museum of Canada Bulletin #81, Anthropological Series, No.18, 1936.

13 — See Knowles, F.H.S. Division of Anthropology: Part 3-*Physical Anthropology*, Canadian Geological Survey, Summary Report, 1915.



This exhibition of photographs by
C.D. Hoy is organised and circulated by

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Untitled – P2094



Moffat Harris – P1671

Kong Shing Sing – P1929



Chief William Charleyboy and his wife, Elainie – P1583



Mathilda Joe – P1631



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C.D. Hoy was a photographer in Barkerville around 1910. A photograph matteboard with "C.D. Hoy, Barkerville" was included in the generous donation of over 1,800 Hoy images made by family members to the Barkerville Historic Town Archives in 1990, with whose permission they are reproduced here. Also on display in Barkerville are Hoy's photographic equipment, watch repair equipment and cameras. Barkerville is the largest restored town in North America – it brings the flavour of the Cariboo Goldfields to life.

For more information please visit: www.barkerville.ca

Untitled – P1712

