



A new collection of
the Royal Alberta Museum

The Ninth Earl of Southesk Collection

Overview:

On May 8, 2006, Sotheby's New York sponsored an auction of historically significant First Nations and Métis artifacts that are an important part of Western Canadian history. The artifacts had been collected by James Carnegie, the Ninth Earl of Southesk, during his travels in Rupert's Land in 1859-60.

The Royal Alberta Museum, with the support of the Movable Cultural Property Grants Program of the Department of Canadian Heritage, the Alberta Historical Resources Foundation, the Government of Alberta's Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, First Nations and Métis representatives and leaders, and museum colleagues, was successful in securing 33 artifacts (29 lots) of the 43 artifacts put up at auction.

The Earl of Southesk's cross-country journey began at Fort Garry (Red River). Led by Aboriginal guides, hunters and interpreters, he travelled across the Saskatchewan Plains, stopping at forts Ellice, Qu'Appelle, Carlton and Pitt before heading to Fort Edmonton and the Rocky Mountains. He returned to Fort Garry via the North Saskatchewan fur trade posts, the Touchwood Hills and lakes Winnipegosis and Manitoba. The Earl acquired these objects on his trip, some through purchase and others as personal gifts. Many were collected at fur trade posts, including Fort Edmonton. The artifacts have been housed in the family's Scottish castle for the last 146 years.

Along with the collection, which is in remarkable condition, the Earl kept a journal of his travels. It includes stories about the artifacts, where and when he acquired them, and the people who made them.

Now these objects have come home to Western Canada where they can be visited, studied, and enjoyed.

Purchased with the assistance of a Movable Cultural Property grant accorded by the Department of Canadian Heritage under the terms of the Cultural Property Export and Import Act.

Some key facts:

- The artifacts' age, provenance and condition make them an outstanding addition to the Royal Alberta Museum's collections.
- Ethnographic objects from the Northern Plains that can be securely dated to the 1850s are rare. Some artifacts of comparable age can be found in European museums, but very few in Western Canada.
- The collection is documented by James Carnegie, the Ninth Earl of Southesk (1827-1905), in a published book (*Saskatchewan and the Rocky Mountains*) based on his travel journals.
- The collection was purchased for \$1,085,812 Cdn, which was made possible through the following: \$600,000 Movable Cultural Property grant of the Department of Canadian Heritage; \$75,000 from the Alberta Historical Resources Foundation, \$25,000 from Alberta Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, and \$386,000 through the Royal Alberta Museum.
- First Nations and Métis representatives and university and museum scholars wrote letters supporting the Museum's purchase of the collection.

History of the Collection:

- The collection was assembled during the Earl's journey across the Canadian Plains in 1859-60. Each object was acquired (some through purchase, and others as gifts) from people whom the Earl met in the course of his travels.
- Kept in storage in Kinnaird Castle for the past 146 years, the objects have been protected from destructive forces. Many are in pristine condition.
- The collection has impeccable provenance. In a number of cases, the Earl acquired these objects directly from the individual who had made and/or used them. He recorded details of some of these transactions, noting the date and place of an object's acquisition and the cultural affiliation of the person who had made it.

Historical Significance:

- One of the collection's most striking features is the diversity of Aboriginal cultures that it represents; the collection includes material of Blackfoot, Cree, Iroquois, Métis, and Nakota origin. This speaks eloquently to the vibrant, multi-cultural quality of Canadian Plains society in the fur trade era, before the signing of treaties and the arrival of European settlers.
- Famous fur trade families such as the Hardistys, Chastellains, Christies and Tait's are represented. So, too, are the guides and hunters who assisted the Earl as well as people whom he met along the way.
- The collection gains added significance through its association with the Earl and his historic trip. As he travelled across Rupert's Land, the Earl witnessed historically significant events and crossed paths with notable historical figures.
- He saw the arrival of the first steamboat to travel up the Red River to Fort Garry and camped with a large party of Métis preparing to set off on the summer buffalo hunt. While staying at Fort Edmonton, he discussed Christian missionary work with Rev. Thomas Woolsey and met the great Plains Cree chief Lapotec. Heading out towards the Rockies, he dined "in comfort and refinement" with Father Albert Lacombe at the Lac Ste. Anne mission.
- On his way back, the Earl met members of the Palliser Expedition at Fort Edmonton and camped with a band of Nakota along the Bow River.
- Likely the first tourist to visit the Canadian Rockies, the Earl is a figure of historical interest in his own right. Prominent landscape features of the Alberta Rockies – Mount Southesk, Southesk Cairn Mountain, Southesk Lake and Southesk Pass – bear his name, and he was probably the first European to see the country between the headwaters of the Athabasca and North Saskatchewan rivers.
- Southesk's journal of his travels, published in 1875 as *Saskatchewan and the Rocky Mountains: A Diary and Narrative of Travel, Sport, and Adventure*, is one of the few accounts we have of mid-19th century western pleasure travel.
- The Earl has even claimed a place in Canadian literature. A colourful character who travelled with a complete set of Shakespeare's works and an "India rubber bathtub," he makes a memorable appearance in Canadian author Thomas Wharton's novel *Icefields*.

Community Benefits:

The collection offers a unique opportunity to learn about the remarkable cultural heritage of Aboriginal nations of the Northern Plains. The artifacts will significantly enhance the new history galleries at the Royal Alberta Museum and provide research opportunities for scholars and students throughout North America. First Nations and Métis people will see historic items from their cultures that originated here more than 145 years ago. As they study these objects and explore the people and stories behind them, visitors will enhance their knowledge of, and appreciation for, diverse First Nations and Métis artistic traditions and the ways that they have changed over time.