

“The Lighter Auxiliaries :”

Women Artists in Nova Scotia in the Early Nineteenth Century

by Mary Sparling

"The Lighter Auxiliaries" is from an unpublished M.A. thesis titled The British Vision in Nova Scotia 1749-1848: Views the Artists Reflected and Reinforced, written in 1978 for Dalhousie University. The Art Gallery, Mount Saint Vincent University, will present an exhibit based on this material October-November 1980. Thanks to the generous support of the National Museums of Canada, the exhibit will travel to the Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto (Jan.-Feb., 1981) and to the McCord Museum, Montreal (March-April, 1981). A fully illustrated bilingual catalogue will accompany the exhibit which will be titled Great Expectations.

Maria Morris (1813-1875), Alicia Anne Jeffery (1808-?), and Millicent Mary Chaplin (active 1838-44) were three women who recorded aspects of Nova Scotian scenery in the 1830s and 1840s. All three were similar, despite vastly different lives and financial circumstances, in that they were "ladies," ladies who had been trained in a polite accomplishment.

In art, as in all other cultural and social matters, the Nova Scotian model in the nineteenth century was provided by the British. Most of the fashionable young ladies of Jane Austen's novels display their drawing skills. The Earl of Durham, when appointed Canada's Governor-General in 1838,

brought a drawing master with him for his daughters.(1) And although Captain William Moorsom might pour chilly water on the colony's cultural aspirations, he himself recognized the force of British influence.

"Oh, Mr.---, if I could but draw like that, I should be perfectly satisfied." "How beautifully Miss H. sings! Don't you think her very accomplished?" . . . In plain English, those acquirements which should be pursued (keeping in view the state of the country) but as lighter auxiliaries that enable us more pleasurably to unbend during our hours of recreation are regarded too much as the "ultima Thule" of attainment, . . .(2)

Earlier, however, he had written: "I was little aware of the feeling with which everything British appears to be regarded in this country: nor is this confined to the upper classes of the metropolis alone; it pervades all ranks, . . ."(3) Even that proud Nova Scotian, Joseph Howe, when defending Captain Moorsom against the ire of some of his Nova Scotian readers said ". . . the book cannot fail to do some good on the other side of 'the water' . . . So little is known of this country at home. . ."(4) (italics mine). As another British visitor observed: "They are entirely British in their feelings and loyal to a degree that reminds one of the reign of George the Third, and the threatened invasion of England by Napoleon, when it was not enough to be loyal, but

everyone was expected to make constant profession of his being so, to prevent his being classed among the disaffected."(5) Even though Moorsom might deride the colonial pursuit of the "lighter auxiliaries," their possession was the hallmark of cultivation in Great Britain, hence in Nova Scotia. Cultivation signified leisure and leisure signified wealth.

By the 1830s, Nova Scotia had made significant gains in the development of a cultivated life for members of its upper and middle classes.

A Nova Scotian oligarchy dominated by British officials and Loyalist exiles governed Nova Scotia until the 1830s. Concentrated in and around Halifax, it was supported by lawyers, merchants, government officials and the established Church of England.(6) Although the power of this conservative clique had weakened by the 1830s, its outward manifestation continued, making it still possible for a British visitor in 1839 to observe:

The general society of Halifax. . . appeared to be more like an English seaport town, than any we had met with since leaving home. The official, professional and mercantile classes, all mingle on a footing of friendly equality; the members of each are so closely interconnected by family ties of relationship or intermarriages that there is more of cordiality and affec-

tion witnessed in their intercourse with each other than is usually seen either in England or America.(7)

Into this interconnection, a transient British population of lieutenant-governors and military and naval officers regularly injected a cosmopolitan appreciation and market for the latest developments in education and entertainment.(8)

Although public schools were not established throughout Nova Scotia until the 1860s, the School Act passed in 1811 had begun the move towards public education. By the 1830s grammar schools were to be found in each county. Of course the affluent minority was educated either in private academies at Windsor and Pictou or at schools and universities in Britain and America.

As well, there were innumerable privately-run day schools and seminaries, both in Halifax and the provincial towns. Typical of the many advertisements for these was that of John Finn who, in 1835 "intends commencing school. . . where youth will be instructed in the different brands of English education, namely, Reading, Writing, Arithmetic, English Grammar, History, Geography with Maps, Algebra, Geometry, Globes, etc. . . Mrs. Finn intends to teach a Female School in an adjoining apartment."(9) Boys and girls attended separate schools, and as in all apartheid situations, re-

ceived a different education. Mr. Finn did not consider it necessary to list even one of the subjects to be taught in the Female School.

Such taciturnity, however, was more than compensated for by the advertisements for the many schools for young ladies. For example, Mrs. Crosskill and Miss Sturmy's announcement for a Female School, promised that "young Ladies will be instructed in plain and fancy Needle-Work, and embroidery, drawing and painting, Velvet painting by guides, Reading, Writing and Arithmetic, the English Grammar, Geography and the use of the Globes."(10) Polite accomplishments took precedence over formal education. However, as the 1830s wore on, the type of education suitable for females became an increasingly lively subject for public debate and criticism. An 1836 notice certainly suggests a change in attitude, for the Misses Morris announced that at their Ladies Seminary they would instruct in "all branches generally comprising a polite education. . . i.e., art and needlework but they never overlook those four grand pillars on which only an enduring superstructure can be raised. . . grammar. . . writing. . . arithmetic. . . and geography. . . and however much the Misses Morris admire the accomplishments which embellish the mind and give to life the graceful charm, still they never overlook the four grand pillars."(11)

In 1835 Joseph Howe began a campaign in the Novascotian for the equality of education, writing that "if you want learned men, make learned women." (12) In a two-part series on "Female Education" by "The Unlearned Scribe," Howe (for he is the unlearned scribe) (13) regretted their lack of a thorough classical education, "the useful branches," and pointed out that under the existing circumstances, attention "is wholly applied to teach them, what is called the ornamental branches consisting of painting, embroidery, music, dancing, etc. etc." (14) No wonder the Misses Morris, perhaps aware too of Captain Moorsom's strictures about "the lighter auxiliaries," stressed "the four grand pillars."

On May 4, 1836, Howe delivered a ringing challenge (to women as well, for they were members) at the Mechanics' Institute's regular meeting. Reprinted later in its entirety in the Novascotian (standard practice for all Institute lectures), the ideas expressed in "the Moral Influence of Women" in no way advocated equality of the sexes. Quite the contrary. Howe urged women not to seek to lead or to strive for equality with men, but to be content with influencing them "without throwing aside the modest deportment of the sex--without stepping over the bounds of masculine thought and occupation--without neglecting. . . household cares and feminine accomplishments. . . ". To achieve this, women must be "regarded as rational

beings, as the friends and companions of the other sex, as the wives and mothers of warriors and statesmen . . ." Furthermore, "Let them teach the idlers and triflers of our sex that our country has neither hands nor minds to spare; that their favours are to be won by public service. . . ; by trophies won in the ranks of patriotism, literature, science and art." (15) In other words, if there are going to be any trophies handed out, the men will win them and then hand them over to the ladies for their favours--even in art.

There is an interesting dichotomy here. In one instance, art is seen as an area for achievement, a field as honourable as that of patriotism, literature and science. But earlier, as "The Unknown Scribe," Howe had lumped painting with embroidery, music and dancing as "ornamental," hence not "useful" education. That particular effusion had ended with ". . . this manner of educating females militates against the well-being of society, detracts from our domestic happiness and retards our progress in knowledge." (16) The conclusion is inescapable. Art is what men do, hence it is useful; painting and embroidery is what women do, hence it is ornamental. Howe was not alone in this belief.

Seventy-nine years later, Harry Piers, Curator of the Provincial Museum of Nova Scotia, read a paper, "Artists in Nova Scotia," to the Nova Scotia His-

torical Society in which he confirmed Howe's thinking that it was the men who did the art:

Above all, however, it seems only just and meet that we record something of a class of cultured men, which. . . has done its utmost in the face of inappreciation, and too often beset by poverty, to keep alive a spark of artistic taste in a new country where we seem to think of what is brutally utilitarian to the exclusion of the elevating influences of what are termed the fine arts.(17)

All the evidence bears out Howe and Piers. An overwhelming majority of artists of whom we have any record were "cultured men." The indefatigable Piers (without whom one sometimes wonders how much of Nova Scotia's past would be available today), records a total of seventy artists, seven of whom are women, in a period covering 1605-1914.(18) A 1974 survey by Charles de Volpi of prints and illustrations of Nova Scotia from 1605-1878, lists forty-three artists, two of whom are women.(19) A catalogue issued in the same year by the Royal Ontario Museum of its Canadian water-colours and drawings from 1750-1900 lists 193 artists, thirteen of whom are women.(20)

Clearly the art that has any value--that which has been collected and thereby survives--has been done in the main by men. Yet in the only catalogue which remains to us of any of

the four art exhibitions held in Halifax in the period 1830-1848, of the seventeen Nova Scotian artists exhibiting, fifteen are women.(21) Why is there such a reversal when one examines a contemporary record of an art exhibit? Where are the works of all those Nova Scotian women today? Certainly not in any known collection and thereby available to the art historian. More important, why are the works of the Nova Scotian male artists in that exhibit, William Eagar and William Valentine, so valued today, so much the subject of research, so well-documented, so cherished in important collections? Because they were better. And why were they better? They were men.

Linda Nochlin, professor of art history at Vassar College, in the trenchant essay "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" asserts:

The making of art involves a self-consistent language of form, more or less dependent upon, or free from, given temporally-defined conventions, schemata, or systems of notation, which have to be learned or worked out, through study, apprenticeship, or a long period of individual experimentation. The fact is that there have been no great women artists, so far as we know, although there have been many interesting and good ones who have not been sufficiently investigated or appreciated--nor have there been any great Lithuanian

jazz pianists, or Eskimo tennis players. . . There are no women equivalents for Michelangelo or Rembrandt, . . . in actuality, as we know, in the arts as in a hundred other areas, things remain stultifying, oppressing and discouraging to all those--women included--who did not have the good fortune to be born white, preferably middle class and, above all, male. The fault lies not in our stars, our hormones, our menstrual cycles, or our empty internal spaces, but in our institutions and our education--education understood to include everything that happens to us from the moment we enter, head first, into this world of meaningful symbols, signs, and signals.(22)

The fact is too that none of the colonial artists--resident or visiting male or female--were great artists. But most of the men, with few exceptions, are competent, and there are some interesting and good ones. Of the three women artists to be looked at in this paper, only one would be considered competent, Maria Morris; and of all the women artists recording aspects of the Nova Scotian landscape from the period 1830-1848, four only could be found from whom to choose.(23)

Like the women artists, the men who painted in this period were white and middle class. But all of them, of

whom we have any record, were either professionally trained in a military academy or school, or had been apprenticed to a professional artist. They were all trained in art as a professional competence, and most of them used it in their vocation or employed it in their leisure moments, later trying to derive a profit from it. The "professional" artist is defined in Nova Scotia today as one who consistently anticipates payment for work or services in the profession of art.(24) None of the women artists in this paper, with the exception of Maria Morris, expected to be paid. They had been instructed in a polite and elegant accomplishment or, as Moorsom described it, in the "lighter auxiliaries that enable us more pleasantly to unbend during our hours of recreation."(25)

Thirteen of the ladies whose works were on display in the 1838 exhibition "have been, or are at present, pupils at Mr. Eagar's Drawing Academy."(26) Most of them came from Halifax's most fashionable families. Mrs. Pyke and Mrs. Ritchie were the wives of a city merchant and lawyer respectively. A thorough search would trace connections with well-to-do Halifax families for the rest of the young ladies. However, even a glance at the names of those who had loaned the important paintings by European artists (eighteen of the artists, all male, are identified) and American artists (seven, all male) to the exhibit shows that four of the

"proprietors," Messrs. Black, Hoffman, Nutting and Fairbanks share surnames with some of the students. Men cultured, and wealthy, enough to own paintings would have female relatives in need of learning the polite accomplishments. Who, other than fashionable ladies, could afford the money or the time?

The European works in Eagar's collection must have been among the "very valuable pictures captured during the War of 1812 and which have long been in the possession of The Chief Justice, the Attorney-General Uniacke and some others."(27) They had been loaned to Halifax's first art exhibition in 1830.(28) Undoubtedly the Rubens and the Van Dyke loaned by Mrs. R.J. Uniacke to Eagar's 1838 exhibition had been purchased from the captured booty by her late husband, the Attorney-General of the province. These were the paintings, and others like them, which hung on the walls of the wealthy Haligonian. The European vision was well represented. Included with those works were portraits by such eminent British artists as Sir Thomas Lawrence and Sir Joshua Reynolds, as well as by American and Nova Scotian artists who painted in the same tradition. In fact the only portraits shown by William Valentine, a self-taught artist who had worked in Halifax since 1818, were all copied from the works of British artists when he was on a visit to England in 1836.(29) Valen-

tine and Eagar, as the two major professional artists in Halifax, were naturally enough using the exhibit as an opportunity to show their capabilities to potential purchasers or students.

That Eagar's students had been suitably stimulated by their teacher's instruction and example can be seen by listing the titles of some of their works:

- No. 29 One of the Evangelists,
Mrs. T. Pyke
- No. 47 Cattle Piece: from original by
Fisher, Mrs. Carroll
- No. 56 Interior of a Monastery,
Miss Black
- No. 59 Cascatelles of Tivoli,
Miss Hamilton(30)
- No. 72 A Fish Woman: a copy from
Ostade, Mrs. Pyke
- No. 82 Ruins at Athens,
Miss Black

One and all they regurgitated the classical European vision.

Yet Eagar had also copied Stangate Creek: from Original by Stanfield. And Mrs. Ritchie had copied two sketches from Gilpin, the English cleric who had invented the term "picturesque beauty" and developed that formula for recording the ordinary and everyday in the landscape of rural England, in contrast to majestic scenes of classical and sublime beauty. Eagar, during a trip to England in 1831, had seen this new method of landscape recording

which had by then become so popular in England that the French in the nineteenth century referred to water-colour landscapes as "L'art anglais." (31) When Eagar first opened for business in Halifax, he announced that he would teach ladies and gentlemen (no gentlemen were listed among his students in the catalogue), "in the rudiments of Landscape Painting and effect." His advertisement continued: "Mr. Eagar begs leave to call the attention of the public to the present style of Water Colour painting, so generally admired by all lovers of the fine arts and so much practised by Prout, Stanfield, Robson, De Wint, Hunt, Cristal and many other eminent artists of the English school, on principles he is prepared to teach. . . ." (32)

Teach those principles he did, as the work of some of his students attests. They had examples to follow such as Eagar's copy of Stanfield, one of the many "eminent artists of the English school," as well as works by Gilpin, probably available as engravings in one of the books which Eagar was certain to have owned. More significant than such imports, however, were the original works by Eagar himself of Nova Scotia scenes. Of these he included in the exhibits, No. 86 Market Place, No. 93 Hollis Street, No. 97 Pleasant Street. (33) Dutifully his young ladies in their turn produced these local views:

No. 77 A View Near the Dockyard,
Miss Black

- No. 79 Argyle Street,
Miss Black
- No. 84 View in Windsor,
Miss Mary Morris
- No. 88 Eastern Passage,
Miss C. Fairbanks
- No. 90 Belmont, North West Arm,
Miss Hamilton
- No. 91 View of Three Mile House,
Miss J. Fairbanks
- No. 95 View of Halifax from Reeve's Hill, Miss Hoffman
- No. 98 Bedford Basin,
Miss Hoffman
- No. 105 Pleasant Street,
Miss M. Black

None of these works survive, which is understandable. The tradition-bound Halifax middle class, as the catalogue shows, obviously did not find local scenes to their liking. Eagar had been shrewd. That he had secured the patronage of His Excellency the Lieutenant-Governor (34) must have helped persuade the sixteen Halifaxians listed in the catalogue to loan over fifty works. Except for portraits, nothing of a local nature was among them. Instead there were such subjects as:

- No. 1 Wandering Savoyards,
Francisco Bigari
- No. 11 Kenilworth Castle,
Faulkner
- No. 22 A Sea Piece,
Vandervelde
- No. 57 Ancient Divine of the Reformed Church, Parrocel

The closest local scenery was in No. 42 View on the Hudstone by W.B. Boggs from New York. Eagar himself, skilled as he was, had great difficulty in finding a local market for his work in his lifetime; how much more unlikely the possibility that the work of any of his students would have any value beyond the sentimental. Their work was a pastime only. No sons of fashionable Halifax families were listed among Eagar's students. This indicates that it was not here that trophies could be won "in the ranks of . . . art," at least not the trophies which Howe had in mind. Howe, as usual, had caught the spirit of his time; Eagar's students, since they were ladies, must have been engaged in an ornamental (useless) occupation only, otherwise their works--bad as they probably were--might have survived. But what a pity (if only for historians) to lose examples of even the bad work of the first generation of native-born Nova Scotians, (35) as they recorded the visual aspects of their own environment, their own time and their own place.

Fortunately three works by another fashionable young lady of the time survive, because they were published.

Alicia Anne Jeffery, born 1808, (36) only daughter of the Honourable Thomas Nicholson Jeffery, Collector of Customs and Member of His Majesty's Council for the Province of Nova

Scotia, had two landscape drawings--one of Parrsboro and one of nearby West Bay, near Partridge Island--printed as lithographs and published. The one of Parrsboro appeared in Abraham Gesner's book Remarks on the Geology and Mineralogy of Nova Scotia, 1836; the one of West Bay in his later The Industrial Resources of Nova Scotia, 1849. In the Parrsboro view, the artist has recorded the houses with careful attention paid to architectural details, the fences surrounding the houses, the litter left at low tide on the beach, a rowboat full of people speeding across the water and a block house surmounting the whole. Quite different is another view of Parrsboro supplied in an 1816 water-colour by H. Pooley, a British army topographical artist. In his view, an orderly pretty little village nestles along a beach. Both the town and the beach, unlike Miss Jeffery's version, are quite empty of disorder or any sign of human activity. A similarly direct comparison of her other West Bay view can be made with a water-colour by George Heriot, West View of Partridge Island from Parrsboro, drawn in 1807. Heriot, like Pooley, was applying a well-learned formula to the Nova Scotian landscape. So we see a typical, picturesquely wild bit of scenery all but devoid of signs of human activity, and it hardly seems real. Miss Jeffery, on the other hand, like most amateurs, is intent on supplying as much information as possible.

She had left Halifax for England in 1837 after her marriage to the commander of H.M.S. Melville, George Augustus Elliott, son of Sir William Elliott.(37) After her departure, her proud father supplied Mr. Gesner with the third work of hers we have left to us. "The drawing at the close of the chapter in the Geology of the Province, is from the pencil of Mrs. Elliott, and was presented to me by the late the Honourable T.N. Jeffery."(38) The drawing, printed as a woodcut, appears at the close of the section titled "Hunting, Sporting, etc."(39) The figure presumably represents a Micmac Indian guide. In the print, we see him holding a rifle, rather formally dressed for the hunt. Traditional moccasins and leggings are supplemented by a long-sleeved coat with epaulette trimming, decorative bands outlining the edges, and a tall brimmed hat with a feather. A cross hangs from his neck. The total effect is stiff and awkward. Yet the dress was characteristic of Indian clothing of the 1830s. Most Micmac Indians had been converted to Christianity by French Roman Catholic priests by the end of the seventeenth century, hence the cross. Indians likewise had adopted and adapted many articles of western clothing, hence the brimmed hat with its feather and the coat. And however ill-drawn the figure, the supporting ground and background landscape, the head conveys a sense of actuality with its long hair, large eyes, aquiline nose and firm mouth. There is a feeling that

this has been drawn from life. An actual Indian proudly dressed in his best clothing had stood before Miss Alicia Anne while she drew him. Compare the costume worn by the man in the woodcut with a studio photograph of Micmac Indian Christina Morris and her son Joe, taken in Halifax between 1863 and 1868.(40) The details of Joe's coat are similar to the coat shown in the print with its epaulette-trimmed sleeves, belted waist and decorated borders. Miss Jeffery might well have taken lessons from an English portrait painter and instructor, L'Estrange, who claimed that "his style of copying nature in her richest attire had been acknowledged by the best informed artists in Great Britain."(41) Surely a drawing of a native Indian was a fine example of copying nature in her richest attire.

Obviously someone had inspired Miss Jeffery to draw scenes from the world around her. Almost certainly she had been a pupil of Mr. W.H. Jones, who had organized two art exhibits at Dalhousie College in 1830 and 1831.(42) These exhibits featured the captured old masters (which Eagar later displayed in 1838) as well as the work of his pupils. Alicia must have been the "Miss Jeffery" listed in a review of the second one held in 1831. Of one of her works, A Cottage, the reviewer noted "the same--or increased--clearness, neatness and vividness of colour (perhaps too extreme) and gracefulness of detail which pleased before are



Woodcut illustration--after a sketch by Alicia Anne Jeffery facing page 224 of Abraham Gesner, The Industrial Resources of Nova Scotia (Halifax, 1849). Courtesy of the Nova Scotia Museum.

visible in this."(43) She had probably exhibited the year before also, as is indicated by this use of the phrase "which pleased before." Whether she had been instructed by Jones or L'Estrange, there was obviously some influence in the direction of drawing original views of one's own place. Not that the striving students received much encouragement from the local critics. One such critic, thoroughly imbued--as were most Haligonians--in the classical tradition, condemned the novelties which one of the works introduced. In a lengthy review of Halifax's first art exhibit, organized by Jones in 1830, of A View on the North West Arm, original, he wrote: "The latter need scarcely be added. Few painters worth copying would select such a scene from our Arm. There are spots on the piece of water, called the Arm, which approach the sublime; others eminently beautiful and strongly marked; and some of as pretty home scenery as need be sought for. This view represents none of these. Take a piece of rather well coloured water; surround it with brushwood; launch a couple of shallops going astray on your water; place a few Indians with features dimly seen; and some sportsmen with their backs purposely turned to you, where they never are; and you have 'A View on the North West Arm.'"(44) (Italics are mine). This description is riddled with examples of the critic's traditional viewpoint and classical expectations. The intentions of artists trained in the modern principles of the

picturesque offended him. Even as late as 1914, Harry Piers was to display a similar prejudice when he wrote of one of Eagar's prints: "'View from the Horton Mountains': a rather good composition, spoilt by the introduction of a tree at each margin instead of one only."(45)

Happily for posterity, Alicia Anne had more than average family support for her endeavours. How else to explain the fact that three of her drawings were printed and published in Gesner's two volumes? Given the fact that all three of her works are clumsily drawn, as well as strange pictorial subject matter for books on the industrial resources of Nova Scotia, it is plausible to speculate that Alicia's wealthy and influential father may have urged them upon the author in exchange for Jeffery's support of the books' publication. Furthermore, her view of Parrsboro displays similar characteristics to a view of Halifax which appeared in Thomas Haliburton's An Historical and Statistical Account of Nova Scotia, in 1829. There is the same rather lumpy landscape; a similar interest in, and treatment of, the houses of both places as if they were little building blocks; the same view of the town from across the water, but with careful attention to foreground details.(46)

Working just a generation before the camera was used to capture the landscape, Alicia Anne Jeffery--a native-

born amateur artist--produced works of some value. This was her country. She knew it well, and she wanted to cram in as much as possible about it in each view. Fortunately for us, her very lack of training and experience meant that she did not know her limitations.

Her British-born and trained counterpart, Millicent Mary Chaplin, did. However, her world had been one where a wide variety of original works of art was easily accessible, and skilled drawing masters readily available:

By 1800 Britain was alive with painters, engravers, watercolorists, satirists, and drawing masters; every provincial society. . . possessed schools of painting of quite exceptional quality. . . Indeed, it was the vigor of British art that led to the foundation of the Royal Academy in 1768. . . The Academy was established not only to give a mark of social as well as professional distinction to the leading sculptors of the day, but also, by the yearly exhibitions, to set a seal of approbation on work being produced. Another of its purposes was to teach--to help produce more artists.(47)

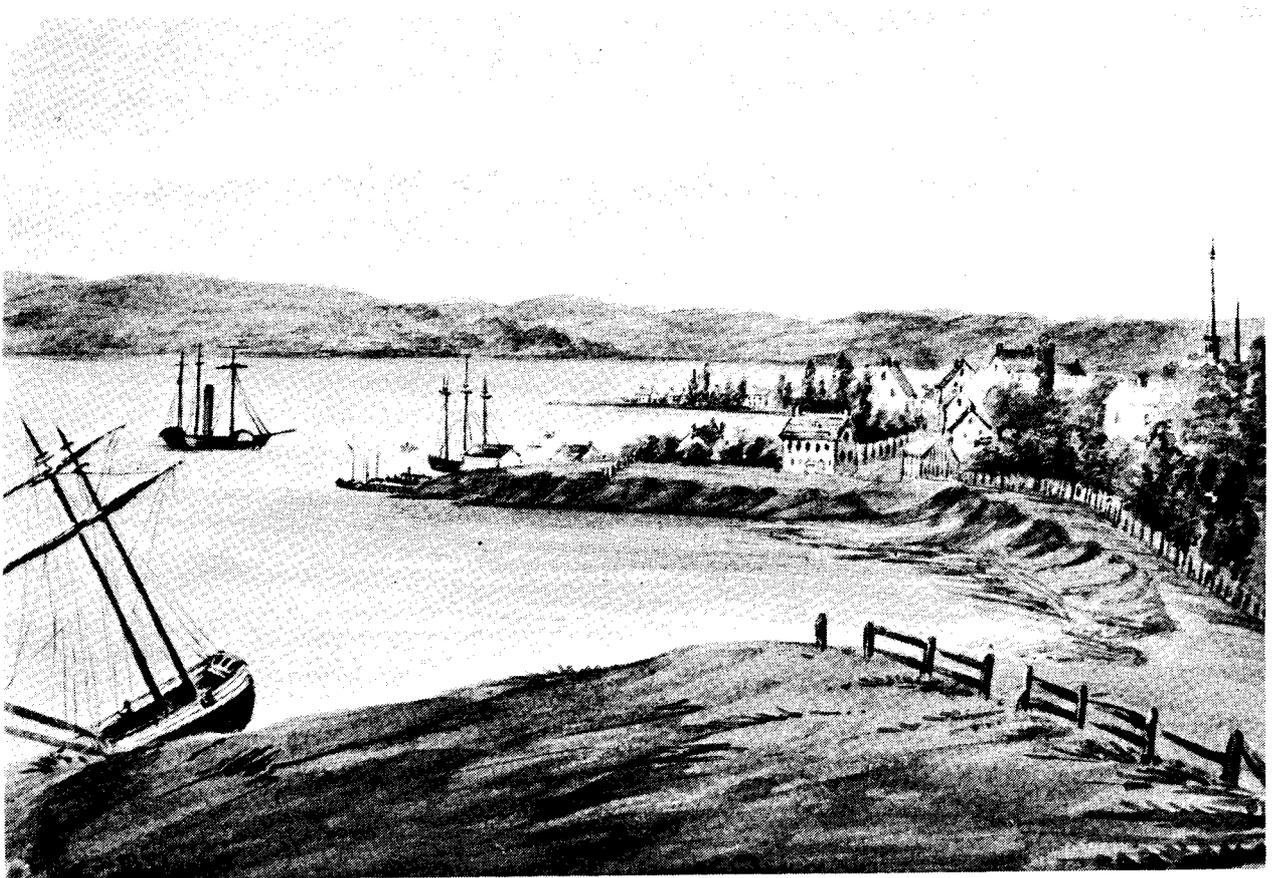
Those artists, in their need to support themselves, taught other aspirants, among them fashionable young ladies in pursuit of an elegant accomplishment. So common was the practice of art instruction to such fashionable young ladies that, even as early as 1760,

Paul Sandby produced A Lady Seated at a Drawing Board. Mrs. Chaplin was married to a lieutenant-colonel in the Coldstream Guards, a mark of her high social status.(48) Instructions from a well-trained drawing master would have been a mandatory part of her education, as would attendance at the many art exhibitions first initiated by the Royal Academy in 1768.(49)

London was a far cry in the early 1830s, from colonial Halifax with its few trained drawing masters (in single file came men like Jones, L'Estrange and Eagar); its two art exhibits with their few old masters luring the visitor to inspect the works of the barely-trained amateur: its small society of "cultured men" who might patronize the few book and stationery stores where prints could be purchased.(50) Alicia Anne Jeffery's privileged world was a much different one than Mary Millicent Chaplin's where ". . . art had achieved a mass market: museums and galleries were established; the practice of art, both professional and amateur, was widespread; and through the print trade art--at least in the form of prints--could reach the poorest tavern, the humblest home."(51)

To Nova Scotia came the amateur artist Mrs. Chaplin, carrying this cosmopolitan art world as invisible baggage, along with the sketch book in which she recorded Pictou from the North East in 1841. Not for her the straight-on,

PICTOU FROM THE NORTHWEST, Watercolour
over pencil, by M. M. Chaplin.
Courtesy of the Royal Ontario Museum
(not the painting mentioned in the text)



close-up record such as Miss Jeffery gives us of Parrsboro and its waterfront. Instead, Mrs. Chaplin safely distances Pictou from the viewer into a little cluster of buildings hugging the shore across an inlet. At least a third of the foreground is given over to a stretch of ground and water (on which a few trees in the right foreground help provide a balance to the mass of the town in the middle left portion.) Except for the location of the churches, it would be very difficult to glean specific information about Pictou from this watercolour sketch. As a landscape, it is carried out with far greater authority than either of Jeffery's views, but it gives only a general impression.

Knowing more about art, Mrs. Chaplin knew her limitations and refused to tackle what she could not carry off with a certain degree of skill. Where originality failed her, she frequently copied works by fellow-artists such as James Hope-Wallace and Henry William Barnard. Both, like her husband, were officers in the British army stationed in Canada and the Maritimes in the late 1830s and early 1840s. All three men would have received the traditional training in topographical art given to officer-candidates at British military schools. Consequently, all three were exercising a professional, not an amateur skill, a product of training acquired in their pursuit of a vocation.

Mrs. Chaplin's vocation was that of a wife; art was her avocation, therefore it was learned as an ornamental skill only. When she wanted to appear professional, she copied the men.

For the amateur, the portrayal of realistic figures presents greater problems than does the depiction of a landscape. Yet the creation of picturesque views often demanded the inclusion of figures pertinent to the full realization of such views. What then would be more characteristic of a Nova Scotian landscape than the representation of native Micmac Indians in their traditional costumes? Predictably Mrs. Chaplin tackled the problem with figure studies as had Miss Jeffery. The result, though more detailed, is just as lifeless. Stock figures display characteristic articles of clothing and equipment but the faces, where visible, are wooden and quite unIndian-like. Miss Jeffery's Indian is a far truer realization of actual Indian physiognomy. However, neither artist dared to show people, not just Indians, in motion, nor other than fully wrapped-up with bulky clothing completely concealing the body. The fact is that the only possible training for realistic figure drawing was with a nude model. In Britain, as in Europe, even the professional women artists--and there were a few--were denied such instruction. A curious result of this appears in a print made in 1773 by Richard Earlom,



INDIAN FIGURE STUDIES
Watercolour over
pencil, by M. M.
Chaplin. Courtesy of
the Royal Ontario
Museum.

after a painting by Johann Zoffany, The Academicians of the Royal Academy. "Because of the presence of the two male models, the only two female Academicians, Mary Moser and Angelica Kaufmann, are discreetly represented by portraits on the wall at the right."(52)

The absence of instruction from a nude model was not a problem for Maria Morris in her chosen field of specialization, that of flower painting. Her choice of subject matter will be seen to be a wholly logical one, given her economic and social circumstances, and the enormous interest in natural history in general, and flower painting

in particular, throughout Europe and Great Britain.

Born February 12, 1810 in Country Harbour, Guysboro County, Nova Scotia, to Guy and Sybella (Leggett) Morris, Maria was a descendant through both parents of distinguished Nova Scotian families.(53) Her mother, Sybella, was the eldest daughter of Captain John Leggett, a Loyalist of the North Carolina Regiment. Maria's father, Guy, was a grandson of the Honourable Charles Morris, Chief Land Surveyor of Nova Scotia and from 1775 until his death in 1781, president of His Majesty's Council. Unfortunately, her father, Guy died just two months after Maria's birth, and Sybella was left with two young children to raise. In a family as large and influential as the Morrises, there must have been considerable support and sympathy for the young widow and her two infants. But the time obviously arrived when Sybella had to contribute to her own support, and how better to do so than in teaching young ladies as she herself must have been taught! It is not known when the family moved from Country Harbour to Halifax, nor whether Sybella had taught first in Country Harbour, but in May 1831 she "respectfully informs her friends and the public that she will open a school May 12 at No. 4 Salter Street just below the residence of the Hon. Hubert Binney."(54) Having thereby satisfied prospective clients as to

the desirability of the location for their daughters, she assured them "that every exertion will be made to promote their improvement. . . , "(55) which would include instruction in French, Music, Drawing and Painting, the latter two subjects by her daughter. Later that year, Mrs. Morris moved her seminary to the rear of the National School and announced that her daughter, "Miss Maria Morris (late a pupil of Mr. W.H. Jones) will at the same time recommence her school for Drawing and Painting in the following branches, viz: Landscapes and Figures in Pencil, Drawing in Crayons, Painting in Oil, Painting in Water Colours, Poonah Painting on rice paper in an oriental style, etc. Specimens of Miss M's performance in the above branches may be seen on application at the School Room."(56)

All the works known with certainty to be by Maria are water colours, from which lithographs were published, of Nova Scotian flora, a portrait of a daughter and a sketch book dated 1865.(57) Other "specimens of her performance" have long since disappeared. There is a single reference to one of her student works in Mr. Jones's second exhibition of pictures held in May 1831 at Dalhousie College: "The Cascatelles of Tivoli by Miss M. Morris is a very difficult subject, executed in a manner highly creditable to the pupil. The trees, sheet of water, and ruins exhibit much neatness and command of pencil, with a very pleasing

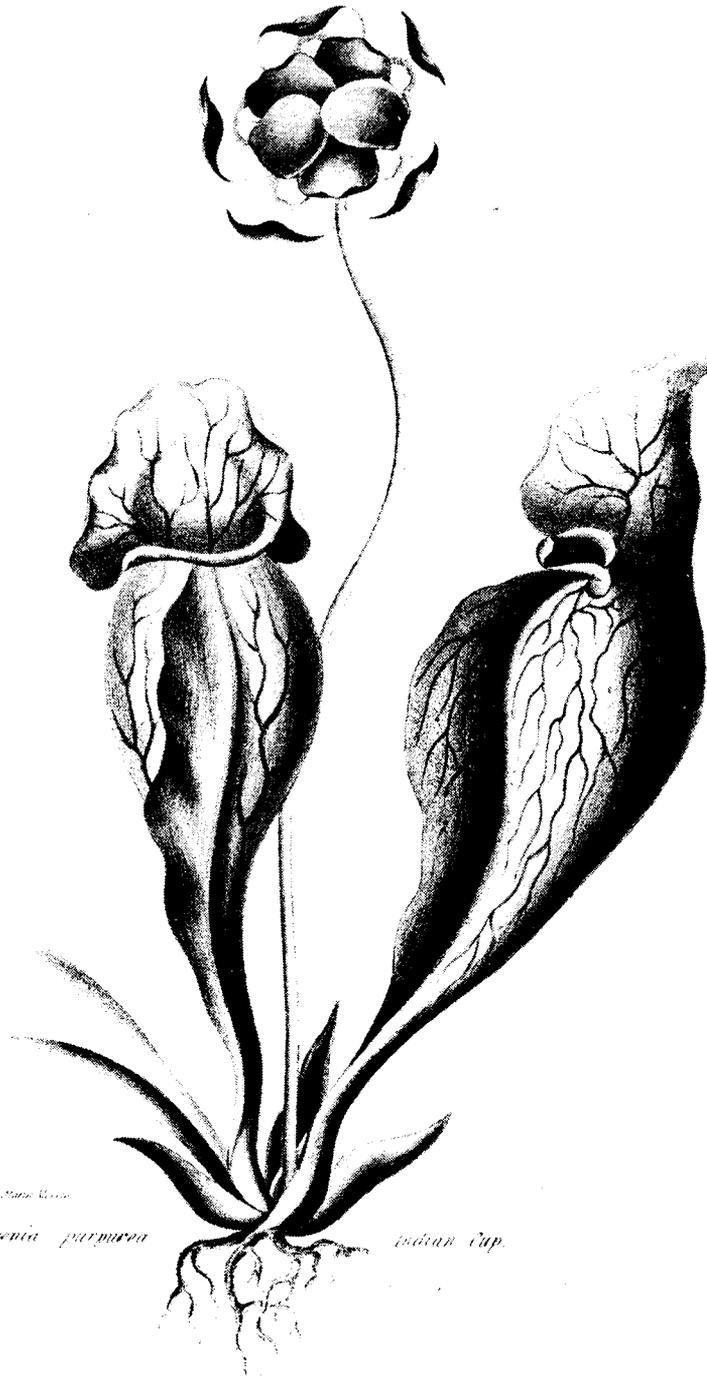
appropriate regard to delicate delineation."(58) Whatever might have been her instruction before becoming a pupil of Mr. Jones, she must have been an apt student of the fashionable branches of drawing and painting. However, knowledge of her work would never have reached beyond the bounds of loving family and friends if she had not turned from the all-embracing versatility, promised by the mother's advertisement, to the specialty of flower painting. Knowledge of her flower painting might have been equally confined if there had not been a series of hand-coloured full-sized lithographs published of her water-colour drawings. How had this young lady of modest means achieved the publication of The Wild Flowers of Nova Scotia? Even more important, what had influenced her to pursue such a specialty in the first place?

It was the height of fashion in England and in the Continent for well-born young ladies to study flower painting. "The widespread popular interest in flowers in both England and France at the beginning of the nineteenth century. . . owed its origin, in part at any rate, to the Linnean system of classification which converted botany into a parlour game for any young lady who could count up to twelve. Books of instruction for the young flower-painter. . . sold by their thousands, especially in England."(59) Queen Charlotte, wife of George III, and her daughters, all took lessons from

Francis Bauer, who was attached as a permanent draughtsman to the Royal Gardens of Kew.(60) There was even an office of "Flower Painter in Ordinary." "Valentine Bartholomew (1799-1879) Flower Painter in Ordinary to the Duchess of Kent and her daughter Queen Victoria, was probably the last artist to hold such office."(61) With royal interest guaranteeing a widespread popularity for flower painting in Great Britain, an increasing number of teachers offered their skills. Botanical copybooks, among them Patrick Lyme's Practical Directions for Learning Flower-Drawing (1810), George Brookshaw's A New Treatise on Flower Painting; or Every Lady her own Drawing Master (1816) and Miss Smith's Studies of Flowers from Nature (c. 1820), flooded the market.(62)

A fashionable skill it surely was. Just when Maria took it up is not known. What is known, however, is that around 1835(63) she had begun to paint not just flowers, but the wild flowers of Nova Scotia, and in a naturalistic rather than a decorative fashion. Aiding her in this task was Titus Smith (1768-1850), a local botanist who "collected flowers for her for this purpose, correctly determined them, labelled her drawings, and generally encouraged her in the undertaking."(64) She produced ninety-nine sheets containing 146 natural-sized species. This was not dabbling in a fashionable pursuit; this was dedication to a vocation. Her alliance with the respected naturalist

Plate II



From the Botany of Maine, 1845

Sarracenia purpurea

Indian Pipe

Published by J. H. Colver, Halifax, N.S., 1845.

Courtesy of the Nova Scotia Museum

Titus Smith, who, in 1801, had made a survey of the natural resources of the province, (65) confirms the seriousness of the undertaking. It was not just flower painting; it was botanical illustration and, as such, the set became the property of the Halifax Mechanics' Institute. Another set became the basis for a series of publications.

She must have been a very determined individual. By the age of twenty-five, despite her regular teaching duties, she had taken up the profession of botanical illustration. That hurdle overcome, she applied herself to the publication of her work, with the result that "early in 1840 she began, through a London publisher, to issue in parts (each number to contain three plates, quarto size) a most beautiful series of coloured full-size lithographs of her water-colour drawings, entitled The Wild Flowers of Nova Scotia with descriptive text by Titus Smith, and under the patronage of Sir Colin Campbell." (66) How did this young Nova Scotian woman with no substantial financial resources, achieve such a feat, quite apart from daring to try it at all? There was no influential father urging it on a local publisher, as had the Honourable Thomas Jeffery for his daughter Alicia.

Perhaps Alicia herself was instrumental. A fellow student of Mr. Jones's art classes, (67) just two years older than Maria, she and Maria might well have been friends. Despite the differences

in their economic circumstances, they were both well-connected young ladies, both interested in art. Alicia had published one of her drawings as a lithograph in 1837 before she married and moved to England. Perhaps it was Alicia who encouraged Maria to undertake the first publication of her work with the London publisher John Snow and C.H. Belcher of Halifax. How else, other than the presence of a powerful friend, to explain that when, later on in that same year, Maria married Garrett Trafalgar Nelson Miller, she was dressed in a gown made from fabric presented by another flower-painter, Queen Victoria? (68) Someone of experience and influence must have been guiding and promoting Maria; it could have been the former Alicia Anne Jeffery. And Maria did name her first daughter Alicia.

Although the series was not a financial success, this must not have been a problem, for Maria's new husband was a wealthy man. It might even have been he who provided the necessary financial backing for the first publication. (69) Five children and thirteen years were to intervene between that first publication and the second in 1853. A third series was issued in 1867 as Wild Flowers of British North America, by which time Maria is listed as operating a drawing school at the corner of Sackville and Hollis Street in Halifax. (70) How long she had been separated from her husband is not known, but by 1860 she was once more supporting

herself through teaching and attempting to sell her prints.(71) The entire undertaking unfortunately was a financial disaster.

Moreover, despite Piers's claim that she was in the "very first rank of botanical painters,"(72) she was not. She was competent and dedicated to her profession; but her work shows she suffered from a lack of real understanding of what to delineate for a proper study of the plant. She rarely included root systems; flowers sit oddly on the stem; leaves often grow with unnatural stiffness; and there is poor gradation in colour and tone. Of little use to a botanist, her work remains as an attractive colonial legacy of a craze which had passed its peak by the time she entered the field. As usual, Howe put the whole matter in its proper perspective when he wrote of Maria's first publication: "A delightful branch of the art of painting that may come to make the ready imitation of nature's handiwork an accomplishment by which the females of Nova Scotia shall hereafter be honourably distinguished."(73) Since it was to be done only by females, it must thereby be delightful, not at all a professional pursuit.

Yet in Europe and in Great Britain, the art of botanical illustration was a professional pursuit.(74) Unfortunately Maria's work fell between two stools, the one the fashionable pursuit of flower painting, the other the

profession of botanical illustration. For the former, an experienced drawing teacher, or the many teaching manuals combined with a study of the specimens, could provide sufficient guidance for a talented student; for the latter, only a thorough study of the flora as well as training in the science of botanical illustration would suffice. The aid of the naturalist Titus Smith in collecting and identifying her specimens was not enough to lift the work of the inadequately-trained Maria Morris to the ranks of botanical painters. Alex Wilson, botanist at the Nova Scotia Museum, says that her work is characterized by a lack of attention to detail, especially the diagnostic features necessary to the identification of a specimen. Indeed, it almost appears that she herself was not genuinely interested in or committed to her subject matter. How else to account for her nearly exact duplication of her original water colour set in the second set she made? She was copying herself, not nature. She must have thought she had discovered a marketable commodity. For a woman of modest means, economic considerations would have to outweigh all others.

Ironically, if Maria had not chosen to confine herself in this way, she might have achieved some distinction in another branch of drawing, that of topographical landscape. Her sketch book of a trip taken to Toronto in 1865 reveals a more than average competence in delineating street scapes

with sharply observed detail. A drawing of Carleton Street, Saint John, New Brunswick includes factories with their smoking chimneys, along with the usual houses, churches and waterfront activity. Her portrait of one of her daughters also displays a very considerable skill. In Maria Morris we might have found an able recorder, before the advent of the camera, of Nova Scotia, its landscape and its people, during a time of change and prosperity. Judging from the quality of the sketches and the portrait, she was more at home with such subject matter.

Of these three women artists, Alicia Anne Jeffery, Millicent Mary Chaplin and Maria Morris, Maria was the only one to pursue art as a profession, both as a teacher and as a painter. It was her fate to suffer the double handicap of inadequate training and misdirected aims. She was the product of a society which reserved its professional training and expectations of high achievement for men. As proof of this, examine the work of another native Nova Scotian, Joseph Brown Comingo, born in Lunenburg, 1798. His work displays the competence which is a product of ability, proper training and work. Not for him the art classes given by itinerant instructors to young ladies; not for him those restrictions which confined young ladies to their homes and families; not for him the ornamental skills. He was a man.

The British vision provided the model for social roles as well as art in Nova Scotia. All societies do this. If we substitute "social role" for work of art," Berger's dictum applies with equal truth to society: "Every social role is a simplification based on a convention." (75)

NOTES

1. Mary Allodi, "John Richard Coke Smythe," Canadian Watercolours and Drawings in the Royal Ontario Museum, Vol. II (Toronto: Royal Ontario Museum, 1974).
2. William Moorson, Letters from Nova Scotia (London: H. Colburn and R. Bentley, 1830), p. 99.
3. Ibid., pp. 7-8.
4. Novascotian, 14 May 1830, p. 151.
5. James Buckingham, Canada, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick (London: Fisher, 1843), p. 342.
6. Terrence Punch, "The Halifax Connection" (unpublished M.A. thesis, Dalhousie University, 1972), p. 7.
7. Buckingham, Canada, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, pp. 341-342.
8. D.C. Harvey, "The Intellectual Awakening of Nova Scotia," Dalhousie Review, Vol. XIII (1933), p. 15.
9. Novascotian, 22 Jan., 1835, p. 27.
10. Novascotian, 3 Nov. 1830, p. 349.
11. Novascotian, 4 Feb. 1836, p. 39.
12. Novascotian, 1 Oct. 1835, p. 286.
13. A conversation with Dr. Murray Beck, Dept. of Political Science, Dalhousie University, Halifax, N.S., Howe's political biographer.
14. Novascotian, 17 Sept., 1835, p. 267.
15. Novascotian, 28 Sept., 1836, p. 306.
16. Novascotian, 17 Sept., 1835, p. 267.
17. Harry Piers, "Artists in Nova Scotia," in Collections of the Nova Scotia Historical Society, Vol. 18 (1914), p. 101.
18. Ibid.
19. Charles P. de Volpi, Nova Scotia: A Pictorial Record (Don Mills: Longmans, 1974).
20. Allodi, Canadian Watercolours and Drawings, Vol. I and II.
21. Catalogue of Mr. Eagar's Exhibition of Paintings, Halifax, 1838. Available at Public Archives, Nova Scotia.
22. Linda Nochlin, "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists," in Art and Sexual Politics, Thomas Hess & Elizabeth Baker (ed.), (New York: Collier Books, 1973), pp. 5-6.

23. The fourth, Mrs. Mary G. Hall (active 1833-1835), executed views of Digby, N.S. J. Russell Harper, Early Painters and Engravers in Canada, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1970), p. 140.
24. Cultural Policy Paper, Nova Scotia Department of Recreation, 1977.
25. Moorson, Letters from Nova Scotia, p. 99.
26. See Eagar catalogue, Public Archives, Nova Scotia.
27. Novascotian, 10 Feb. 1830, p. 47.
28. Ibid.
29. Among these were: No. 14 Sir Humphrey Davy: a copy from Lawrence's celebrated picture. No. 23 Sir Edward Home: from the original by Philips. Eagar too acknowledged such copies as No. 51 A Copy from Reubens, No. 60 Stangate Creek: from original by Stanfield. His No. 69, An Italian Landscape was probably a copy too.
30. This must have been a popular and accessible subject for copying. Maria Morris had also copied it for Halifax's second art exhibition in 1831. Halifax Monthly, 1 June 1831, Vol. II, p. 30.
31. British Watercolours, Undated press release, National Gallery, Ottawa, 1977.
32. Novascotian, 3 Sept., 1834, p. 285.
33. Note that the exhibition visitor must have been lured by traditional works in portraits, historical scenes, genre studies and landscapes, all numbered up to 76 in the catalogue, before they were assailed by examples of "the present style," all of which occur between 77 and 125. Layouts of exhibits traditionally follow the numbering in the catalogue. See Eagar catalogue.
34. Times, 3 Mar., 1838, p. 83.
35. Joseph Brown Comingo is a rare exception. Born in Lunenburg, Nova Scotia, in 1784, he left some fine watercolour views. See Harper, Early Painters and Engravers in Canada, p. 72.
36. Baptism record, St. Paul's Church, Halifax, 10 Jan., 1808, Records of St. Paul's Church, Public Archives of Nova Scotia.
37. Times, 9 May, 1837, p. 150.
38. Abraham Gesner, The Industrial Sources of Nova Scotia, (Halifax: A. and W. McKinlay, 1849), p. iv.
39. Ibid., pp. 220-224.
40. Ruth Whitehead, Christina Morris, Micmac Artist and Artist's Model, Material History Bulletin, No. 3 (Ottawa: National Museum of Man, 1977), pp. 1-13.
41. Piers, "Artists in Nova Scotia," p. 124.
42. Novascotian, 10 Feb., 1830, p. 47; Novascotian, 29 April 1831, p. 131.
43. Halifax Monthly, 1 June 1831, p. 35
44. Halifax Monthly, June 1830, p. 13.
45. Piers, "Artists in Nova Scotia," pp. 142-143.
46. Why Haliburton chose such a view of Halifax is otherwise hard to explain, unless he, like Gesner, had been pressured. Joseph Howe, the publisher, inserted this statement: "The publisher has to apologize for the appearance of the View of Halifax which he regrets is not equal to his wishes. The person by whom it was politely furnished, not being aware that the engraver required a plain ink drawing, coloured the view: and as it was executed by an American Artist, quite unacquainted with the scene, it makes rather a meagre and imperfect picture." Yet Haliburton in his preface wrote: "For the correct and beautiful view of Halifax prefixed to the second volume, I am indebted to a Lady of that place, whose name I regret I have not permission to mention..." Haliburton, An Historical and Statistical Account of Nova Scotia, (Halifax: Joseph Howe, 1829), Vol. I, p. viii.
47. J.H. Plumb, The Pursuit of Happiness: A View of Life in Georgian England. (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale Centre for British Art, 1977).
48. Her husband's artist friends and fellow officers were members of the British aristocracy; one of them, James Hope-Wallace, later became Lord Wallace. Mary Allodi, "James Hope Wallace," Canadian Watercolours and Drawings, Vol. 1.
49. An 1829 painting, The Interior of the British Institution Gallery by John Davis, "records an exhibition of Italian, Spanish, Flemish, Dutch and English masters that opened in June of 1829 at the British Institution" in London. And increasingly common were houses such as the one shown in Thomas Rowlandson's 1817 A Gentleman's Picture Gallery. Cf., Plumb, The Pursuit of Happiness, p. 49.
50. Moorson had made a slighting reference to Halifax's single bookstore, Novascotian, 14 May 1830, p. 150.
51. Plumb, Pursuit of Happiness, p. 21.
52. Ibid., p. 47
53. Beginning with Harry Piers, there has been much confusion about the identity of Maria Frances Am Morris; therefore, I am including some genealogical information. She had one other sibling, a brother James, born in 1808. Their father died in 1810. He was Captain Guy Morris, son of James B. Morris, son of the Honorable Charles Morris, the Chief Land Surveyor of Nova Scotia until his death in 1781. Maria has often been identified as the Miss Mary E. Morris who, with her sister, also gave art lessons in the 1830's. However, that Miss Morris's father was Alexander, born 1765, son of Alexander (and Hannah Doane), another son of the Honorable Charles. Mary Eleanor had two sisters who helped their widowed mother, Ann Bouser, run a school. She is undoubtedly the Miss Mary Morris listed in Mr. Eagar's catalogue for his exhibition in 1838. Our Maria, by that time, was probably devoting herself full-time to her flower paintings; had she been in the exhibit, she would have been represented by that work. A third confusion is with the Maria who co-authored a volume of poetry, Metrical Musings, in 1856. She was Maria Mahon who, in 1803, married John William Morris, son of Samuel Morris, yet another son of the Honorable Charles Morris. Maria Mahon Morris wrote Metrical Musings with her daughter Catherine. Miss Ethel Crathorne, "The Morris Family," Nova Scotia Historical Quarterly, Vol. 6, No. 2, July, 1976, pp. 207-214.
54. Halifax Monthly, May, 1831.
55. Ibid.
56. Novascotian, 29 Dec., 1831, p. 389.
57. All are in the collection of the Nova Scotia Museum, except for the portrait which is represented by a photograph.
58. Halifax Monthly, Vol. II, No. 13, 1 June, 1831, p. 30.
59. Wilfred Blunt, The Art of Botanical Illustration (London: Collins, 1950) p. 266.
60. Ibid., pp. 196-198.
61. Ibid., p. 216.
62. Ibid., p. 218.
63. The paper is watermarked 1834 and 1835.
64. Piers, "Artists in Nova Scotia," p. 139.
65. "Titus Smith," Encyclopedia Canadiana, 1975, Vol. 9, p. 341.
66. Piers, op. cit., p. 139.
67. Halifax Monthly, Vol. II, No. 13, 1 June, 1831, p. 35.
68. Family tradition. Mrs. Sanford, a granddaughter, has a sample of the fabric.
69. A large landowner in Halifax and Bridgewater, "his wealth was estimated to be in the hundreds of thousands." Obituary, Liverpool Advertiser, 28 July, 1897.

70. Hutchinson's Nova Scotia Directory for 1866-67.
71. A government document refers to a petition from Maria for a donation or a purchase of copies of her work, 12 Dec., 1860, Document 61, Vol. 104, Public Archives of Nova Scotia.
72. Piers, "Artists in Nova Scotia," p. 140.
73. Novascotian, 1840.
74. See particularly the chapter on Francis and Ferdinand Bauer. Blunt, The Art of Botanical Illustration, pp. 195-208.
75. John Berger, "Problems of Socialist Art," Radical Perspectives in the Arts, ed., Bakandall (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1972), p. 215. The original quotation is: "No work of art can do justice to the whole complexity of reality. Every work of art is a simplification based on a convention. The convention itself emphasizes a particular aspect of nature in accordance with the interests of the particular social group or class that has created it."