

Central Canada Exhibition Poster of 1913

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The first Central Canada Exhibition Poster of 1913 (CCE) at Lansdowne Park in Ottawa opened in 1888 under the guidance of Prime Minister John A. MacDonal and Governor General Lord Stanley, who there made his first public debut to the Canadian people.¹ Two days prior to this opening, the CCE Association had purchased an advertisement in the Ottawa Daily Citizen that quite simply stated the dates and hours of operation with an address listed “for prize lists and other particulars.”² Despite this rather lacklustre marketing campaign and before the professionalization of the business itself, the first Exhibition proved to be a huge success. Hosting exciting amusements such as a hot air balloon ascension and an electronic display of lights, the 1888 Exhibition established the fair as one of Ottawa’s most inventive attractions.³ By the early twentieth-century, the CCE had become a known public institution of agricultural and technical innovation as well as sensational entertainments, and accordingly adapted modern advertising formats to reach its audience.⁴

The Central Canada Exhibition Poster of 1913 emerged from a tradition of World’s Fairs and National Expositions that developed across Europe and North America through the nineteenth-century, and continue into the modern era. Initially individuals, private organizations, and state bodies worked to formalize this event as a series of sights and experiences arranged for the spec-

tator.⁵ This function echoed even in their promotional materials, which often depicted the fair as a spectacle in itself, and contributed to the popularization of highly visual print advertisements in the modern era.

A local example of this World’s Fair advertising tradition can be found in the Museum of Science and Technology’s Library and Archive, which contains a print advertisement for the Ottawa Central Canada Exhibition Poster of 1913 of 1913. Framed against a faded green background detailing the date, time, location, and exhibits, a view of the fair grounds presents local upper-class citizens with an opportunity to indulge in the possibility of exciting entertainments through an anticipatory representation of the upcoming event.⁶ Passers-by may have imagined themselves as one of the small silhouettes represented in the poster, as part of the large crowd seated in the grandstand, or of the scattered groups which move from one gallery to the next.

The Exhibition of 1913 would be the busiest one to date; this year inaugurated new buildings with exhibitionary spaces, and previous record-breaking sales years were surpassed by nearly ten thousand dollars. The Exhibition of 1912 had been named in honour of the Dominion government’s generous contribution of fifty-thousand dollars to the CCE Association, which went toward general improvements of the grounds and

the construction of Machinery Hall.⁷ The structure opened for the 1913 fair, boasting over fifty-five thousand square feet of floor space filled with mechanical agricultural exhibits.⁸ But this was not the only new building promoted and pictured in print advertisements—Howick Hall had recently opened in 1906, and the Arts’ and Ladies’ Building in 1908. Aberdeen Pavilion and, in a way, the grandstand, are the oldest structures pictured in the poster that still remain today.⁹ All of these buildings are represented in the poster’s framed landscape of the grounds, constituting a “bird’s eye view”—a form of representation that transformed the act of seeing into a stable interpretive process executed by the viewer outside of the frame.¹⁰ The aerial as a totalizing and stabilizing perspective is but one of the two motifs exhibited by the CCE poster that were common to the advertisement of expositions at the turn-of-the-century; the other, which partly obscures this spectacular view of the fair grounds in the CCE poster, was woman as allegory.

Historically, the eternally youthful, plainly graceful female figure has been used and readily recognized as a symbol of nationhood and progress (e.g. Athena, Europa, Britannia, Lady Liberty, Justice and Peace, etc).¹¹ The representation pictured in the Central Canada Exhibition Poster of 1913 poster may not bear the typical signs of allegory—not like the classicized figure of Miss Canada, who appeared in early twentieth century newspapers like

the Montreal Star with a maple-leaf encrusted shield, emerging from the illuminated heavens—but it works within a similar frame of reference.¹² She too bears a shield of “advance[ment],” portraying the changing technologies of transportation and agriculture, and her dress, though it folds and hangs in a similar elegant fashion, is a contemporary design rather than a traditional, classicized style. The distinction is quite clear: this is a modern woman on her way to the city’s finest modern spectacle celebrating technological advancement in Ottawa and, partly, in Canada.

Just like the CCE arose in the age of innovative World’s Fairs and National Expositions, so too did the chromolithographic print. Lithography superseded a wood-engraving method as the dominant printing process in the latter half of the nineteenth century, as the broadening of communications and markets progressed on a global scale.¹³ This was only further established by the exhibitionary event which operated on a scope large enough to warrant the latest in contemporary design and thus, as Graham Hudson writes in his history of print ephemera in Britain and North America, “through its production of large colourful posters, chromolithography brought a new visual interest to the urban scene.”¹⁴ The printing company which produced the CCE’s poster, Mortimer Company Limited, was active in Ottawa from 1865 to 1974.¹⁵ Another chromolithographic advertisement printed by Mortimer and Company dated between 1875 and 1920 uses similar, simple visual signifiers and lettering to that of the CCE poster—like the aerial view, placing ‘E.B. Eddy’s Manufacturing & Lumbering Establishments’ within Hull’s landscape.

In contrast to the commercial print, however, the turn at the end of the nineteenth century was also the

period in which the “art poster” emerged as a specialized type (as Henri Toulouse-Lautrec’s debuted his first poster in 1891).¹⁶ This too would soon extend into the realm of the exhibition. For example, Czech-born artist Alphonse Mucha, who worked in Paris and Vienna at the turn of the century, famously produced extremely intricate and unique designs for advertisements—including one for the St. Louis World’s Fair in 1904.¹⁷ Pictured in Much’s print is a pale young lady with a fashionable hairband, draped in a silky, vibrant orange dress, a sceptre with the symbols of man’s progress to her left, and, crouched behind her, an ‘Indian protector.’¹⁸ Mucha’s poster for the St Louis fair shared the common motifs of patriotic allegory and advancement present in local exhibition advertisements like that of the Central Canada Exhibition Poster of 1913 of 1913, which often used ‘othered’ people as props in a central narrative of colonial exceptionalism.

World’s Fairs and National Expositions operated as complex organizational structures that ordered objects for the inspection of a privileged eye; this applied also to peoples and cultures.¹⁹ In the Central Canada Exhibition Poster of 1913, the main event of the fair, known as the “grand spectacular,” is listed as *The Siege of Delhi*. In the middle of the racetrack is a stage, set up for the viewing pleasure of the audience which is seated in a full-to-the-brim grandstand. From our view outside of the poster, we can only see the back of this stage: a wooden-board cut out into what is presumably meant to be the skyline of New Delhi, which is here characterized by a silhouette of high towers and onion domes. Workers are pictured mingling about the stage, unable to enjoy the frivolities of the fair-goers as they run in between the two-dimensional set and two small huts placed for their convenience. It is a small wonder

why whomever designed this poster would have included such a scene—it would mean that the artist would have accepted the commission to provide a projection of this specific Exhibition of 1913, including the specific elements which the poster was to advertise. What coincidence then, that two pieces of the missing puzzle—a dog show and daily airplane flights²⁰—which have broken and fallen off the poster over time, are not represented in the artist’s fantastical imagining of the Central Canada Exhibition Poster of 1913 of 1913.

Notes

1. Ottawa Daily Citizen (25 September 1888) as quoted in The Central Canada Exhibition Poster of 1913 Association’s The Central Canada Exhibition Poster of 1913 Association Through 65 Years: 1888-1953 (Ottawa: Runge Press Ltd, 1953), 13-14.
2. The Central Canada Exhibition Poster of 1913 Association Through 65 Years, 12.
3. “Rural Roots,” The CCEA: 109 Years of History [An Online Exhibition], http://epe.lac-bac.gc.ca/100/200/301/ic/can_digital_collections/superex/english/index.html (retrieved 2 November 2016).
4. “Exhibits: Early Years,” The CCEA: 109 Years of History [An Online Exhibition].
5. *The Book of the Fairs: Materials about World’s Fairs, 1834-1916* (Chicago and London: American Library Association, 1992), 47.
6. Tony Bennett, “The Exhibitionary Complex,” *New Formations*, no. 4 (Spring 1988): 73-102.
7. The Central Canada Exhibition Poster of 1913 Association Through 65 Years, 17.
8. *Ibid.*, 28.
9. *Ibid.*, 11.
10. Bronwen Wilson, “Venice, Print, and the Early Modern Icon [excerpt],” *Urban History*, Vol. 33, No. 1 (2006), 50.
11. Bennett, “The Exhibitionary Complex,” 87; Robyn Fowler, ““A New Canadian National Spirit”: Allegorical Miss Canada and the Occult Canadian State,” *Culture + State*, ed. Gabrielle Eva Marie Zezulka-Mailloux and James Gifford, (Edmonton: CRC Humanities Studio, 2003), 41.
12. Fowler, “A New Canadian National Spirit,” 42.
13. Graham Hudson, *The design and printing of ephemera in Britain and America, 1720-1920* (London: British Library, 2008), 97.
14. *Ibid.*, 99.
15. Plate 35 in “Commercial and Fine Art Printing in Canada 1850-1950,” *Public Archives of Canada*. 395 Wellington St, Ottawa, Ontario, K1A 0N4. May 7 to 22, 1984; The poster states: Mortimer and Co Limited: Ottawa & Montreal. Further research would be needed to verify this; it is likely that the company was partly based in Montreal at some point after establishing itself in Ottawa.

16. Hudson, *The Design and Printing of Ephemera in Britain and America*, 99.
17. Alan Brinkley and Vincent Virga, *Eyes of the Nation: A Visual History of the United States* (Charlestown, MA: Bunker Hill Publishing Inc, 1997), 210.
18. *Ibid.*, 210.
19. Bennett, "The Exhibitionary Complex."
20. From "The CCEA: 109 Years of History [An Online Exhibition]": "in 1913, an aviator and his airship arrived at the fair and began to fly daily rides." Dog shows have been hosted by the CCE extensively.

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