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Résumé de l'article

Alan Caswell Collier (1911-1990) était un paysagiste ontarien important du XX^e siècle. Dans les années 1940 et 1950, il a fait progresser sa carrière en représentant des mines et des mineurs, ayant lui-même travaillé sous terre dans le nord de l'Ontario pendant la Grande Dépression. Son tableau commandé en 1968, Mining in Ontario, fait maintenant partie de la collection d'art du Macdonald Block, à Queen's Park. Les écrits volumineux de Collier se trouvent dans les archives de l'Université Queen's et cet article est basé sur des recherches approfondies dans cette collection, une source importante pour les spécialistes de l'histoire de l'art de l'Ontario. L'exploitation minière était une activité industrielle de premier plan dans la province au vingtième siècle, et Collier était à l'avant-garde de la représentation artistique de son développement. Il était à la fois un Ontarien hors du commun et un Ontarien ordinaire - hors du commun par son talent mais, à bien d'autres égards, un Anglo-Canadien ordinaire: il a vécu dans des camps de secours et des dortoirs dans les années 1930, a servi en uniforme dans les années 1940 et s'est installé dans la banlieue de Toronto dans les années 1950. Son art minier rappelle une période d'expansion dans l'histoire de l'industrie ontarienne.

'TERRIFIC WEIGHT OF ROCK ABOVE ME'

Alan Caswell Collier's Mining Art

by Peter Neary

The Toronto artist Alan Caswell Collier, best known for majestic pan-Canadian landscapes, also produced a large body of art inspired by first-hand knowledge of the mining industry. His mining art celebrates resource development and the advance of the country economically in the 1950s and 1960s. In Collier's landscapes, Canada is empty and unspoiled; in his mining pictures industry dominates—a source of pride and national achievement. His mining *oeuvre* exemplifies a Canadian tradition of artists who went to the edge of the country's unfolding frontier and visually reported what they saw. Arguably, this is a line that connects Paul Kane in Athabaska; Frances Anne Hopkins with the fur traders of the nineteenth century; British military painters in early-settler Canada; Emily Carr on Haida Gwaii (formerly Queen Charlotte Islands); and Lawren Harris and A.Y.



Jackson journeying north to show the vastness of the land. It is in this larger context of Canadian art history that Collier's work should be understood and appreciated. His depictions of mining operations reflect the *zeitgeist* of post-Second World War Canada, a time of nation-building projects and unprecedented economic progress, exemplified by the St. Lawrence Seaway, the Trans-Canada pipeline, the Trans-Canada Highway, the national microwave network, and Alberta's oil boom. In the 1950s alone, the gross national product of Canada doubled in value.¹

¹ William Kilbourn "The 1950s," in J.M. S. Careless and R. Craig Brown (eds.), *The Canadians 1867-1967* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1967), 314.

Abstract

*Alan Caswell Collier (1911-1990) was a major Ontario landscape artist of the twentieth century and, in the 1940s and 1950s, advanced his career through depictions of mines and miners, having himself worked underground in Northern Ontario during the Great Depression. His 1968 commissioned picture, *Mining in Ontario*, is now part of the art collection at the Macdonald Block, Queen's Park. Collier's voluminous papers are in the archives of Queen's University and this paper is based on extensive research in this collection, a major source for scholars of Ontario's art history. Mining was a leading industrial activity in the province in the twentieth century, and Collier was at the fore in representing its development artistically. He was at once an uncommon but ordinary Ontarian – uncommon in his talent but in many other respects an Anglo-Canadian everyman: he lived in relief camps and bunk-houses in the 1930s, served in uniform in the 1940s, and moved to Toronto suburbia in the 1950s. His mining art recalls an expansive boom period in the history of Ontario industry.*

Résumé: *Alan Caswell Collier (1911-1990) était un paysagiste ontarien important du XX^e siècle. Dans les années 1940 et 1950, il a fait progresser sa carrière en représentant des mines et des mineurs, ayant lui-même travaillé sous terre dans le nord de l'Ontario pendant la Grande Dépression. Son tableau commandé en 1968, *Mining in Ontario*, fait maintenant partie de la collection d'art du Macdonald Block, à Queen's Park. Les écrits volumineux de Collier se trouvent dans les archives de l'Université Queen's et cet article est basé sur des recherches approfondies dans cette collection, une source importante pour les spécialistes de l'histoire de l'art de l'Ontario. L'exploitation minière était une activité industrielle de premier plan dans la province au vingtième siècle, et Collier était à l'avant-garde de la représentation artistique de son développement. Il était à la fois un Ontarien hors du commun et un Ontarien ordinaire - hors du commun par son talent mais, à bien d'autres égards, un Anglo-Canadien ordinaire: il a vécu dans des camps de secours et des dortoirs dans les années 1930, a servi en uniforme dans les années 1940 et s'est installé dans la banlieue de Toronto dans les années 1950. Son art minier rappelle une période d'expansion dans l'histoire de l'industrie ontarienne.*

Born in Toronto in 1911, Collier was the second of three children, all sons, of Robert Victor Collier and Eliza Frances Caswell. The Colliers were middle class, Liberal in politics, of Methodist inheritance, and firm adherents of the United Church of Canada following its formation in 1925. Vic Collier ran a tailor shop on Yonge Street, and Alan imbibed the family's work ethic and business sense, while exhibiting a strong visual

imagination and an inventive streak. In 1929, having graduated from Harbord Collegiate Institute, he registered at the Ontario College of Art (OCA). There he met Ruth Isabell Brown, the only child of a prosperous Brantford family: her father, George Pritchard Brown, was a leading figure in a company that provided equipment to the Canadian pulp and paper industry. Alan and Ruth quickly became devoted to one another

and looked forward to engagement and marriage. Unfortunately for them, the Great Depression of the 1930s cast a long shadow over their loving relationship. Given their family and class backgrounds, marriage required Alan to be a breadwinner, but becoming established in this role proved exceedingly difficult. His long quest to secure gainful employment and the impact this had on his and Ruth's marriage prospects highlight the crisis of Canadian youth in the 1930s.

Collier graduated from OCA in 1933, the year that marked the bottom of the steep economic downturn that had started in 1929. He was unable to find work, but thanks to a family political connection was able to spend time that summer sketching at a provincially run highway work camp at Deux Rivières, near North Bay. He hitchhiked north with his art school chum John Kopacsi and they quickly acquired hobo skills, ending their sojourn by riding the rails and thumbing their way to Quebec City and then back to Toronto. In July 1934, still out of work, Collier set out for Vancouver, where he hoped his Uncle Bert, a local notable, could help find him a job. From Toronto he hitchhiked to Detroit and then linked up with a young American chance acquaintance to drive a car to Los Angeles for a Detroit car dealership. After visiting relatives in California, he hit the road again, arriving in Vancouver on 17 August.

When his job search there also proved futile, he decided to go on relief for the winter. From September 1934 to May 1935 he lived in three relief camps in the interior of British Columbia, the

first near Revelstoke, the second at Tappen (near Salmon Arm), and the third at Notch Hill (near Sorrento). The camps, administered by the Department of National Defence, were part of a national network the Dominion government had established to house, feed, and clothe the army of single unemployed men now a grim reality in the country. Alan started out doing roadwork on the Big Bend Road, near Revelstoke, but thanks to his education was able to rise through the ranks of camp management and ended his days on relief as a storeman, an office job. He was on the scene when the mobilization began that led to the explosive Communist-led On-to-Ottawa Trek of 1935, one of Canada's most searing Depression-era events, but he had no part in this uprising. Independent minded and contrarian, Collier was a critic of the relief camp system but had no sympathy for the Relief Camp Workers Union and rejected Communism. Very much his own man, he was single-minded, blunt, purposeful, and relentless in pursuit of the goal of one day making a living as an artist.

As a high school and college student, he had become a devoted diarist and his legacy to Canadians is both literary and artistic. Before heading west in 1934, he sent Ruth, who was now living at home back in Brantford, an engagement ring and told her that while away he would put in letters to her what would normally go into his diary. The result was an extensive correspondence, now excerpted and reconstituted as a diary in my 2018 *Alan Caswell Collier, Relief Stiff: An Artist's Letters from Depression-Era British Columbia*, pub-

lished by UBC Press.² Collier's relief camp letters to Ruth encompass about 280,000 words and are a rich source for understanding the day-to-day life of the down-and-out young Canadians—known as the Royal Twenty Centers because they were paid twenty cents a day—who found their way into Ottawa's camp system. A record that Collier kept of his art begins with his relief camp pictures, sixty-one in number.³ Included in this collection were portraits of a number of fellow relief recipients, depictions that constitute a unique body of work from a deeply troubled time in Canadian history.⁴

In June and July 1935, Collier slowly made his way back east through the United States, visiting many natural wonders and, *comme d'habitude*, travelling rough. He was on the road for fifty-seven days. Back in Toronto and living at home, he faced an employment situation that was as bleak as the one he had left the previous year. While attending OCA, he and another student, Bruno Cavallo, had sold art supplies. Now he and Herbert (Butch) Webster, another art school contemporary, tried to launch a paint supply business for artists (they hoped for cus-

tom from their alma mater) but this venture floundered. By the spring of 1936, after a winter of fits and starts, Alan again thought of leaving the city, this time to look for work in northern Ontario, the legendary "New Ontario" of fame, fortune, larger-than-life figures like Harry Oakes, and boomtowns like Sudbury, Timmins, and Kirkland Lake—and still a beacon even in the Depression-era provincial economy. As with his Deux Rivières trip in 1934, he again benefited from a family connection. On the evening of 19 May, while he was still making up his mind about what to do next, he and his father visited the grand Baby Point home of Duncan Marshall, MPP for Peel and Minister of Agriculture in the Liberal government that had been in power in Ontario since 1934 with Mitchell F. Hepburn as premier.⁵ Alan hoped to sell some art to Marshall, "a tough old Scotchman."⁶ This didn't happen, but opportunity opened up for him when the conversation turned to the possibility of him heading north, something Marshall had already promised Vic Collier he would look into. As luck would have it, Marshall picked up the phone then

² The account of Collier's life given here draws on this work.

³ Collier used a letter and number system to keep track of his work. The record he kept is in ten parts, with the letter I omitted: A (1934-55); B (1955-60); C (1961-65); D (1965-67); E (1967-70); F (1970-74); G (1974-77); H (1977-81); J (1981-86); and K (1986-90). The original document is in the holdings of the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, and will be referenced here as "Art Record." I am grateful to Alicia Boutilier of the Agnes Etherington Art Centre, Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario, for providing me with a digital copy.

⁴ Ian Munro Collier has a collection of these. While in the BC camps, Alan also sold portraits to fellow relief stiff's.

⁵ Queen's University Archives, Alan Caswell Collier Fonds (hereafter QUA), 5008.1-1-12, Collier to Brown, 19 May 1936. For Marshall's house, which looked out over the Humber Valley, see <<https://www.the-globeandmail.com/real-estate/home-of-the-week-a-hilltop-house-with-a-colourful-history/article568891/>>.

⁶ QUA, 5008.1-1-12, Collier to Brown, 19 May 1936.

and there, called John Godfrey, the well-connected head of the Ontario Securities Commission, and gave Alan a glowing recommendation for work in the north, noting that the Colliers were good Liberals. Godfrey was accommodating and instructed Alan to meet him the next morning at his Queen's Park office.

At this appointment Godfrey gave Alan a letter of reference and sent him on to the Bay Street office of the Cuniptau Mine, located at Goward in the Temagami region of Northern Ontario.⁷ There he met Bram Watkins, son of mine owner B.E. Watkins, who opened the door for him to a job. On 22 May, having hurriedly tidied his affairs, Collier left Toronto by train for Goward. A steady stream of letters to Ruth, written in the manner of his relief camp correspondence, followed. These invite the editor's craft and are a rich source for understanding day-to-day life on the Ontario mining frontier of the period and the hardscrabble work life of many young bunkhouse Canadians in the 1930s. While living in this rough-edged, male world, typical of frontier life, Collier longed and hoped for settled married life—an elusive prospect for many of his hard-hit generation.

The Cuniptau Mine dated from 1933 and its name was an amalgam of the scientific nomenclature for the minerals extracted on the site: Cu (copper), Ni (nickel); Pt (platinum), and Au (gold).

An underground shaft had been dug in 1933 and was extended in 1934. When Alan arrived on the scene, new processing facilities were under construction. He worked as a "lousy labourer," taking on challenging construction jobs and writing that he was "interested in cash, not ease."⁸ A whistle sounded at the mine at 6.00 a.m., breakfast was at 6.15, and the workday began at 7.00 a.m.⁹ "I have done more work in these last three days," he wrote soon after arriving, "than I did in my six weeks on the Big Bend Road. No wonder relief stiffs can't stand this work."¹⁰ Alan's first pay cheque, received on 10 June, was for \$10.40, with about \$20.00 owing.¹¹ He went underground for the first time on 12 June when he assisted engineer Boyd Taylor in surveying work. In typical fashion, he described the events of the day to Ruth in granular detail:

I had never even been inside the shaft house before. The cage is not very big, I don't think more than four men could stand in it. It is just more or less a metal bucket with floor, roof and two solid sides, the other two sides being folding gates which were folded open so that you had to watch your elbows weren't sticking out. All the signaling is done by means of a bell in the hoist house which is rung by pulling a lever at the various levels.... When we were in Taylor rang twice, meaning "lower" and then once meaning "first station." There is nothing to see while going down but rocks and timbers. We had to go down

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ QUA, 5008.1-1-13, Collier to Brown, 24 May 1936.

⁹ *Ibid.*, Collier to Brown, 26 May 1936

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ QUA, 5008.1-1-13, Collier to Brown, 10 June 1936.

to the 200 ft. level but the diamond drillers had been drilling in a hole in the shaft almost midway between 100 ft. & 200 ft. so we had to get off at the first station and walk the rest of the way. We stayed at the 100 ft. level for a few minutes and I got my first look at what a mine really looks like. At that station there is a fairly decent sized room with a couple of drifts or stopes¹² or whatever they call them, going off to either side, I have heard of drifts and stopes but I don't know which is which. Anyhow, these tunnels are quite narrow, only about four feet wide in places and varying in height from six feet upwards. Everything is soaking wet and the walls are dripping all the time. Underfoot is wet too with several inches of water in places. Everything is not only wet but is covered with muddy slime so that the rocks aren't clean wet rocks but muddy wet rocks.... When we started down to the 200 ft. level we had to go down the man-way which goes down beside the hoist-way. It is just ladders that are almost vertical, each one about 15 ft. long. Taylor was carrying the gun [surveyor's transit] itself and I had to carry the tripod. The instrument part of it is too valuable to entrust to a person like me. It seemed an awfully long 100 ft., just ladder after ladder, each one soaking wet and slimy. The water was coming down in great style, almost like a heavy rain....

At the 200 ft. level we set up the gun on its tripod and started to "shoot" things. There are certain points around the mine, both on the surface and underground whose exact location and elevation is known. All other measurements are based on them...We were down there to plot the exact location of sev-

eral diamond drill holes. I did various things such as suspending plumb-bobs from some of these known stations, which are usually a peg on the ground or ceiling, or holding a tape and other things. The water on the floor of the 200 ft. level was quite deep in places and the tracks were sometimes under water. There is a steam pump down there but they have been having trouble with it and it hasn't been going for a couple of days. The various steam, water and compressed air lines run down the man-way beside the ladders....

When we climbed out we stopped at the place where the drillers drilled last and made some measurements; then we ascended to the first station. On our arrival Taylor remembered that he had forgotten one measurement so I had to climb down to the drill hole again. I was puffing plenty when I got up there again. We then made several surveys in the first level, some of them right up at the working face and then came to the surface. We were both filthy dirty so Taylor said that I had time for a shower if I wanted one. I had to have one tonight anyway so I jumped at the chance.¹³

On 2 July the new mill at the mine was used for the first time and on 21 July an opening ceremony was held, though work on the smelter continued.¹⁴ On 26 July Alan, who quickly developed an interest in the shares of mining companies, found time to make two sketches and in August Ruth made a brief visit north.¹⁵ On 27 October, however, he lost his job when there was a general layoff at the mine.¹⁶

¹² In mining parlance "drift" refers to a horizontal or inclined passageway following a vein or seam of ore; "stope" refers to an excavation site,

¹³ QUA, 5008.1-1-13, Collier to Brown, 12 June 1936. In the interest of easy reading but without changing meaning, I have lightly edited quotations from Collier's letters.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, Collier to Brown 2 July and 22 July 1936.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, Collier to Brown, 27 July and 7 August 1936.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, Collier to Brown, 27 October 1936.

From Goward, Collier headed to Kirkland Lake to look for work, renting a room and eventually starting work on a self-portrait, a continuing artistic interest.¹⁷ He also contacted the local United Church of Canada minister, Jimmy Graham, a friend of his older brother Bruce.¹⁸ The latter, a University of Toronto PhD in biochemistry was serving at the time at West China Union University, a missionary enterprise of the United Church in Chendu, Sichuan. After Sunday morning service on 1 November, Alan, who fussed over whether he had the right clothes to attend church, had dinner with the Graham family.¹⁹ Luckily for him, another guest was Ken Kilborne, an engineer at the Omega gold mine at nearby Larder Lake, whose brother Leslie and sisters Constance and Cora were also in Chengtu (Ken would later describe himself to Alan as “the black sheep of his family”).²⁰ On 18 November, thanks to this contact and now medically qualified for a miner’s card—the required passport to a job—Alan began work underground at the Omega mine, which at the time produced 500 tons of ore per day and employed 180 men.²¹ He first worked at Omega pulling chutes, said to be “one of the easiest jobs,”

but he soon took on the strenuous work of a “mucker,” loading cars and moving ore along for transfer.²² In graphic accounts, he detailed for Ruth his many new experiences as a hard-rock miner:

[15 December 1936] The nitro glycerine in the dynamite can give you a terrific headache especially if you handle it with your bare hands and then wipe your forehead. The smoke and fumes give many fellows headaches but I have worked where the smoke is so thick that you can hardly see the end of your shovel and it doesn’t affect me.²³

[18 December 1936] They talk about the romance of gold, but there isn’t much romance for the mine labourers. If you could see a bit of gold once in awhile it might pep things up, but I’ve only had one little flake pointed out to me since I have been here. Most of it is so disseminated through the quartz and rock that it is not visible to the naked eye.²⁴

[21 December 1936] Sometimes when I am mucking and my partner is away with a car, I sit down and shut off my light and sit in the darkness. It is complete darkness; you can touch your eyelashes with your finger without seeing said finger. It is very restful.²⁵

[30 December 1936] Those safety hats that we wear are pretty fierce, aren’t they. Not one man in ten can look at all jaunty in one. I try to wear mine at as rakish an angle as

¹⁷ QUA, 5008.1-1-14, Collier to Brown, 13 November 1936.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, Collier to Brown, 30 October 1936.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ QUA, 5008.1-1-14, Collier to Brown, 27 December 1936.

²¹ *Ibid.*, Collier to Brown, 17 November 1936. See also “Omega Progresses Satisfactorily,” clipping from *Northern Miner* enclosed in QUA, 5008.1-1-14, Collier to Brown, 7 December 1936.

²² QUA, 5008.1-1-14, Collier to Brown, 21 November and 2 December 1936.

²³ *Ibid.*, Collier to Brown, 13 December 1936.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, Collier to Brown, 18 December 1936.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, Collier to Brown, 20 December 1936.

possible but I don't think I succeed in looking at all sporty.... I have one innovation on my hat that no other fellow has. According to the compensation board, we are supposed to wear screen goggles when breaking rock. Only about a fifth of the fellows have them and they keep them on their hats, but they are a nuisance as it takes a long time to unhook them and then fasten them around your head. They are held on by elastic. I bored a couple of holes in the brim of my hat at the sides and ran the elastic through there and around the hat. Now I keep them up on the brim in front, under my light, like a peak, and when I want to use them I just pull them down and they are all set. I got them only a week ago, after Beatty [manager] saw Jim breaking a rock with none on and told the three of us in 502 to get them. They cost 40 cts. I intended getting a pair anyway as you get some nasty chips in the face sometimes. You often draw blood that way. I got a good crack in the eye, which was closed, and it scared me. I've also broken two lamp glasses that way²⁶

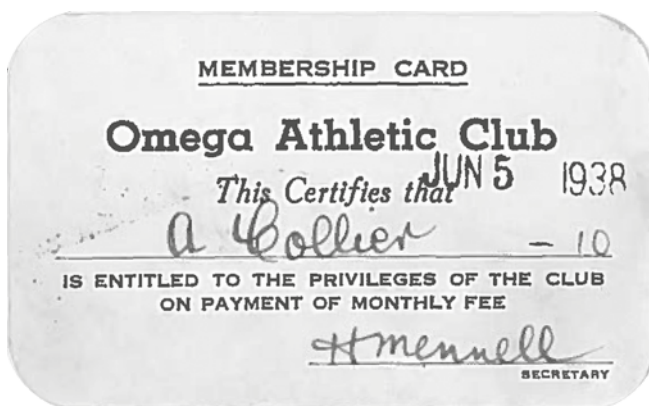


Figure 1: A memento Collier kept of his days at the Omega Mine. Larder Lake, Ontario (Queen's University Archives, 5142-3-32).

[8 January 1937] I believe that I told you about having such a tough shift in 104 on Tuesday night. It was the worst I have ever had yet. I think that the other two were feeling rotten too, the gas sure takes it out of you. I got to the point, before lunch, where I would stagger with every shovelful... As soon as I ate my lunch, I lay down and dozed for about 15 minutes. It is funny how you become used to conditions underground and can make yourself comfortable anywhere but in a pool of water. Where I was lying was a pile of old muddy timbers and the one I was on was choicely covered with slimy mud. When I first went underground I was always conscious of the terrific weight of rock above me, it sort of pressed me down. Now I think no more of it than if I were working in a darkroom. Other fellows have said that they have felt the same and that now the top of the stope or drift is just a roof. When we work under a drip someone is sure to joke that we should go up and put some new shingles on the roof. In a high back stope you can't see the back, or roof, and you feel as though you were working in a narrow canyon. I should have said that you can't see the back unless you turn your light upwards.²⁷

In September 1937, supporting himself with savings, Collier went to New York to study at the Art Students League, an ambition he had nurtured for some time. On his very last shift at Omega, he had a close call: "I felt pretty peppy at the end of the shift but had a sore mouth. I had been hammering on a big rock and a piece flew up and hit me on the mouth. It darn near knocked out

²⁶ *Ibid.*, Collier to Brown, 30 December 1936.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, Collier to Brown, 8 January 1937.



Figure 2: The young Collier in mining gear (Queen's University Archives, 5142-3-40). A framed copy, in the collection of Ian Munro Collier, has this notation: "Alan Collier taken by himself."

my front teeth and cut my lower lip on both the inside and outside. I spat blood for a long time and my lip is still swollen and bruised on the inside. It was really my worst injury received at Omega and it is odd that it happened on the last shift."²⁸ Not surprisingly, he was glad to get away and enter a new phase of life.

The Art Students League, a renowned American art school dating from 1875, was a magnet for young Canadian artists and Alan fitted easily into Gotham student life, coming under the

influence of well-known artist and faculty member Howard Trafton in particular. To keep himself going, he returned to the Omega mine in the spring of 1938 and again in 1939, becoming thereby "an artist eight months of the year and a gold miner the other four."²⁹ He was at Omega when Canada went to war on 10 September 1939 and six days later gave vent to his feelings in a letter to Ruth that captured the frustration of a generation of young Canadians stymied by the Great Depression:

In your letter that came yesterday you spoke as if I had better reconcile, myself to staying here for the winter, and in one place you even said that you hoped they confined the fighting to Europe as you didn't want to see any of it. It's funny what a difference there is in the feeling down there and up here. From your letters and letters from home and letters that other fellows get, it seems that people are much more hysterical down there. Up here everyone is quite calm and the fellows have practically stopped talking about the war in the dry,³⁰ where you used to hear nothing else. Because of the rigid censorship on news you would almost think that there was no fighting except between Germany &

²⁸ QUA, 5008.1-1-15, Collier to Brown, 4 August 1937.

²⁹ QUA, 5008.1-2-4, Collier to Brown, 21 March 1939.

³⁰ Short for dryhouse, where miners cleaned up after working underground.

Poland. We all read the Toronto & Montreal papers and listen to the radio but it is hard to get excited on what they've been presenting this week. Perhaps *Life*³¹ was right this week when it said that it might possibly be that France & Britain are just stalling until Germany conquers Poland and then they will let Germany have another "Munich" conquest. I've read more in N.Y. Times and *Life* about the war than in anything and they give about as neutral a view as possible. Papers like the *Star*³² should be banned. They print more darned junk than you would think possible and they probably stir up more hysteria than anyone. It's the kind of people like those who run the *Star* who forced Canada into the war. The Times spoke of Canada's declaration, saying how King³³ wanted to stay out because he saw the advantages to be gained by being neutral, but his hand was forced by a number of "patriots." I'll bet these patriots are over 45 and English. These damned "Limeys"³⁴ are hot to get into it and have a queer sense of patriotism (I just read a good explanation of patriotism some place—it is self-interest multiplied by population). The day I found out that miners were exempt from conscription, I mentioned it to Austin Leyland who is terribly English. You would think that I had made a seditious speech, the way he acted.

There was a German lad who changed next to me in the dry named Harold Gehlsen, known as "The Flying Dutchman." He was a very nice fellow, as most of the Germans are and the only thing against him was that he didn't have his citizenship papers although

he'd been here for 12 years. He was on his holidays but returned to work on Monday, and O'Connell [company official] laid him off. He's pretty bitter about it, I guess and I don't wonder. They are certainly asking for trouble when they do things like that. This country is just full of Germans who have been laid off and they haven't been taken into custody yet. I think that if there is any need to fire them, they should lock them up, too. If they are dangerous, it is better for them to have jobs than to be roaming around and maybe going broke and feeling bitter.

O'Connell has told all the foreigners, even the Poles, to hurry and get papers as soon as they can. Most of them have but a few haven't.³⁵

On his return to Toronto from Larder Lake, Alan went to New York with his younger brother Ted, who saw the sights while Alan contemplated what to do next in life.³⁶ He returned to Toronto hoping that a job offer in commercial art would be forthcoming from the Charles R. Peters Studios (he had known Peters for some time).³⁷ When this did not materialize, he returned to New York anyway, leaving Toronto on 14 October with his visa about to expire.³⁸ He lived frugally in New York, found work as a monitor at the Art Students League and, by frequenting and helping out at the Chas. Peters Studios, got a fulltime job there in January 1940.³⁹ As a resident alien in the United States Collier

³¹ Popular American weekly, known for its excellent photography.

³² *Toronto Star*.

³³ Liberal Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King.

³⁴ Derogatory term for a British person.

³⁵ QUA, 5008.1-2-5, Collier to Brown, 16 September 1939.

³⁶ QUA, 5008.1-2-6, Collier to Brown, 3 October 1939.

³⁷ For the name of the firm see *Ibid.*, Collier to Brown, 14 January 1940.

³⁸ QUA, 5008.1-2-5, Collier to Brown, 4 September 1939, and file 6, 14 October 1939.

³⁹ QUA, 5008.1-2-6, Collier to Brown, 13 November 1939 and 14 January 1940, and file 7, 26 January

had a military draft number and followed call-up closely.⁴⁰ Now that he had a steady income, he and Ruth were finally able to marry, an event that occurred in Brantford on 7 April 1941. The happy couple then lived in an apartment that Alan had found at Parkchester in the Bronx.⁴¹ Following the nuptials, Ruth, who had run a studio shop in Brantford, abandoned her own art career in favour of the prevailing domesticity.

The newlyweds were not long settled when, following the Japanese surprise attack on Pearl Harbour on 7 December 1941, the United States went to war. In 1942 the Colliers retreated to Toronto, probably to avoid Alan being drafted.⁴² They rented an apartment in the west end and Alan retrained as a sheet metal worker.⁴³ He then went to work at Victory Aircraft in Malton, a company that built bombers. There, in a big shift in political direction since his relief camp days, he became a union activist and then a member of the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation. Henceforth, he was an ardent social democrat. A 1943 self-portrait, now in the collections of the Art Gallery of Ontario, shows him at work in his new job. In April 1943 Collier was called up under the terms of the

1940 National Resources Mobilization Act, Canada's conscription legislation for home defence. He enlisted, however, as a volunteer, liable for service anywhere, and served in the Royal Canadian Artillery, training at Petawawa for its survey arm. In 1944 he was nominated by Group of Seven artist Franklin Carmichael for membership in the Ontario Society of Artists. But he was turned down when two contrasting pictures he submitted to the Society's 1944 show, *Canadian Youth – 1943* and *Canadian Youth – 1944*, were considered too "radical" in content.⁴⁴ In February 1945, Collier shipped out to the United Kingdom, and he was there when the war in Europe ended in May. He left the army in Toronto on 21 March 1946 at age thirty-five.

After the war, Alan worked for the well-known Toronto commercial art firm of Rapid Grip and Batten, where he put to good use the knowledge he had acquired in New York (historically, commercial art has been the day-job refuge of many aspiring Canadian artists). While employed there, he exhibited in the annual show of the Ontario Society of Artists (he was again turned down for membership in 1947 but finally achieved this

1940.

⁴⁰ QUA, 5008.1-2-9, Collier to Brown, 6 October and 4 November 1940.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, Collier to Brown, 23 February 1941. The address was 1690 Metropolitan Ave., Parkchester.

⁴² For this period of his life see my *Alan Caswell Collier, Relief Stiff, An Artist's Letters from Depression-Era British Columbia* (Vancouver: UBC Press 2018), 301-308.

⁴³ Their new address was 70 Tyrrel Avenue.

⁴⁴ For these pictures see Neary, *Alan Caswell Collier*, 305. The pictures, which comment incisively on two decades of Canadian history, are now in the collection of Ian Munro Collier.

⁴⁵ See note in Art Record, A109.



Figure 3: *Collier at McIntyre Mine, Schumacher, Ontario, 11 October 1952* (Queen's University Archives, 5008.1-10-76).

distinction in 1951),⁴⁵ went on sketching excursions, and undertook private commissions. In 1946 he did a posthumous portrait for his employer of company notable Howard Batten and was paid \$250.⁴⁶ The next year he did a portrait of his army chum Don Munro, giving him the picture on permanent loan.⁴⁷ For another commissioned posthumous portrait, of Frank Harris Anson, the founder and first president of Abitibi Power and Paper (done in March-May 1947), Collier was paid \$450.⁴⁸ In 1948 he sketched in Nova Scotia and, in that year and again in 1949, at St-Sauveur, Quebec.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Art Record, A105.

⁴⁷ Art Record, A109. Munro gave the picture to his sister.

⁴⁸ Art Record, A110.

⁴⁹ Art Record, A122-23 (Nova Scotia) and A125-27 and 133-35 (St-Sauveur).

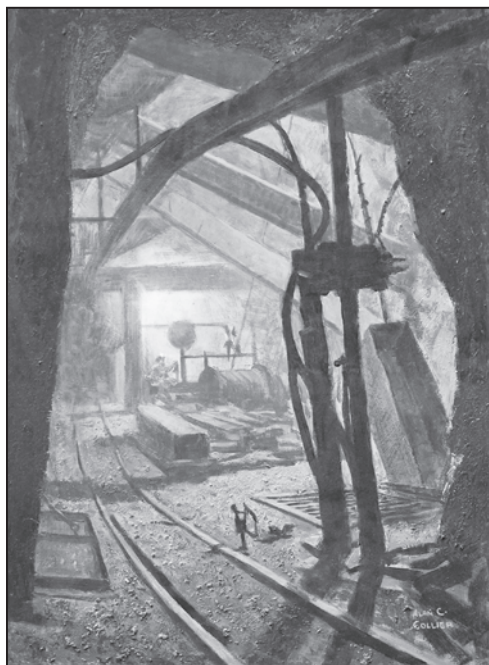


Figure 4: *The 4025 Hoist, McIntyre, Schumacher, Ontario, January 1953, Duco on Masonite, 68.6 x 50.8 cm, collection of Andrew Rookley.*

In 1949 also he and Ruth bought a house at 115 Brooke Avenue in North York, where they lived for the rest of their lives (a studio was added in 1955). In 1950 their only child, a son named Ian Munro (the second name in honour of Don Munro), was born. Alan's membership in Toronto's eclectic Arts and Letters Club, of which he became a prominent member and where he often showed his work, dates from the same year.

In 1951, capitalizing on his knowledge of and connections in the mining industry, Collier made the first of a series



Figure 5: Dumping Slag – Copper Cliff, Sudbury, Ontario, 6 October 1954, oil on board, 30.5 x 40.6 cm, collection of Andrew Rookley.

of artistic visits to working operations when he ventured forth to the Delnite Mine near Timmins.⁵⁰ The next year he followed up with visits first to the New Calumet Mine on Calumet Island, Quebec, in the Ottawa River, and then McIntyre Mine at Schumacher, Ontario.⁵¹ His practice on these trips was to sketch extensively and use some sketches for bigger studio works. He made eighteen sketches at the Delnite Mine, ten at New Calumet, and fully thirty-one at McIntyre.

In 1952 he exhibited mining pictures at the Arts and Letters Club and in 1953 at a mining convention held in the Royal York Hotel, Toronto.⁵² In 1954 his interest in northern resource enterprise was rewarded when he was chosen to contribute a painting of Sudbury to a collection of pictures of Canadian cities sponsored by the House of Seagram. The purpose behind the Seagram project, the brainchild of Samuel Bronfman and with A.J. Casson as the lead artist, was to “earn

⁵⁰ Art Record, A145-47.

⁵¹ Art Record, A155-56 (New Calumet) and A159-63 (McIntyre).

⁵² See notes in Art Record, A145. The acronym RYC refers to the mining show at the Royal York (see first page of Art Record, A (1934-55)).



Figure 6: *Sudbury*, 18-28 July 1954, oil on Masonite, 74 x 101.3 cm, Samuel Bronfman Collection for Seagram – La Collection Samuel Bronfman pour Seagram, M2000.83.104, Musée McCord Museum, Montreal.

increased friendliness and broader understanding of Canada abroad by showing the people of other lands the impressive aspect of the cities our Canadian people have built.”⁵³ Twenty-two artists contributed to the series and their pictures were widely exhibited both nationally and internationally and celebrated in the handsome *Cities of Canada: Reproductions from the Seagram Collection of Paintings*, published by the House of Seagram with

commentary by Bernard K. Sandwell.⁵⁴

Collier prepared for his work by visiting Sudbury in July 1954 and making five sketches.⁵⁵ Between 18 and 24 July, with the agreement of Seagram, he painted up his submission from the third of the sketches, the one he liked best: “Basically, I kept the composition as it was except for the angle of the smoke, which I brought more over the city as a canopy rather than blowing it off to the side.”⁵⁶

⁵³ See newspaper clipping “Cities of Canada Painting Collection Coming to Sudbury” in Art Record following A188.

⁵⁴ For an account of the collection see the introduction to Anne Mackay, “The Frame in Context: The Seagram *Cities of Canada* Collection at the McCord Museum,” *Journal of Canadian Art History/Annales d’histoire de l’art Canadien*, 35:2 (2014), 155-72.

⁵⁵ Art Record, A186.

⁵⁶ Art Record, A187.

The result was a picture measuring 74 x 101.3 cm, which showed Sudbury as a city of mining success, emblematic of the progress of Canada, its smokestacks denoting progress rather than pollution. For his efforts Alan was paid \$750 for the painting and three sketches, plus \$50 for expenses (2 days at \$25) and \$40 for transportation.⁵⁷ Seagram required no changes in his work and the company attended to the framing.⁵⁸ When the Seagram collection was eventually shown in the main auditorium of Sudbury's Memorial Hall, more than 700 attended the preview, including Mayor Leo Landreville (later to be caught up in a national scandal) and other local notables.⁵⁹

In October 1954 Collier again sketched in Sudbury and then at the Preston East Dome Mine in Timmins.⁶⁰ From 5 to 7 November 1954, he drew on one of his sketches of the latter operation to complete a commission from the staff of the company for a picture to be presented to mine manager Bill Hutchinson on his retirement.⁶¹ The commission commanded a fee of \$200; by contrast, a commissioned portrait he delivered in

July 1955 of Frowde Seagram, the president of Dominion Life Assurance Co. in Waterloo, Ontario, fetched \$1,000.⁶² In May 1955, Collier received further public recognition when he was included in a group of twenty-six Canadian artists who had work purchased by the National Gallery of Canada.⁶³ From his *oeuvre*, the Gallery acquired, for \$400, *Ore Car on the 2875 – Delnite*, which he had painted 19-26 October 1951.⁶⁴

In September 1955 Collier's career entered a new phase when he joined the OCA faculty as an instructor in its Advertising Art (illustration) Department. The next month, though, he found time to continue his mining peregrinations with visits to Kirkland Lake, Ontario, and Noranda, Quebec.⁶⁵ In January and February 1956 he completed the 76.2 x 101.6 cm *Noranda*, which was bought by the eponymous mining company for \$450.⁶⁶ A press clipping Alan kept in his art record shows Noranda Mine Company chairman and president John R. Bradfield standing in front of the picture, which highlighted "the giant twin smelter stacks

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ See newspaper clipping "Sudburians Preview Painting Exhibition," in Art Record following A188. For Landreville's career see William Kaplan, *Bad Judgment: the case of Mr. Justice Leo A. Landreville* (Toronto: Osgoode Society, 1966).

⁶⁰ Art Record, A189-92 (Sudbury) and A194 (Preston East Dome).

⁶¹ Art Record, A195.

⁶² Art Record, A200. See also newspaper clipping "Portrait donated to Museum" which follows.

⁶³ *Globe and Mail*, 21 May 1955, 3. See clipping "National Gallery Buys Paintings of 26 Canadians" in Art Record, following A146.

⁶⁴ Art Record, A148.

⁶⁵ Art Record, B1-2.

⁶⁶ Art Record, B10.



Figure 7: *Noranda*, January-February 1956, Gesso on Masonite, 76.2 x 101.6 cm, privately owned. In the record he kept of his art, Collier wrote of this picture: "In the sketch I had had it divided into half sky and half land so I lowered the horizon in this. Made more of the smoke, too, using a light smoke against a darker sky. The sun through a hole in the clouds had lit the smoke while I was sketching so I photo'd it and used the slide for dope. Added the sign on the flume, as per photo, to tie together the foreground and middle distance" (Collier Art Record, B10).

of one of the world's largest mining companies."⁶⁷ Like his depiction of Sudbury for the Seagram collection, Collier's *Noranda* unashamedly celebrated Canadian industrial advance and might -- belching smokestacks and all. In the expansive 1950s, smoke signified progress and prosperity rather than pollution.

In the summer of 1956, the Collier family took the first of a series of annual summer road trips, made pos-

sible by Alan's academic appointment, to distant parts of Canada. Their initial expedition was to British Columbia, a venture during which Alan produced seventy-five sketches. In Edmonton he took a keen interest in the refining operations of Imperial Oil, a company he then cultivated, eventually publishing in the *Imperial Oil Review*. While on the road, he also produced a sketch depicting "Mining in Canada" for the 1957

⁶⁷ Art Record, newspaper clipping following B11.

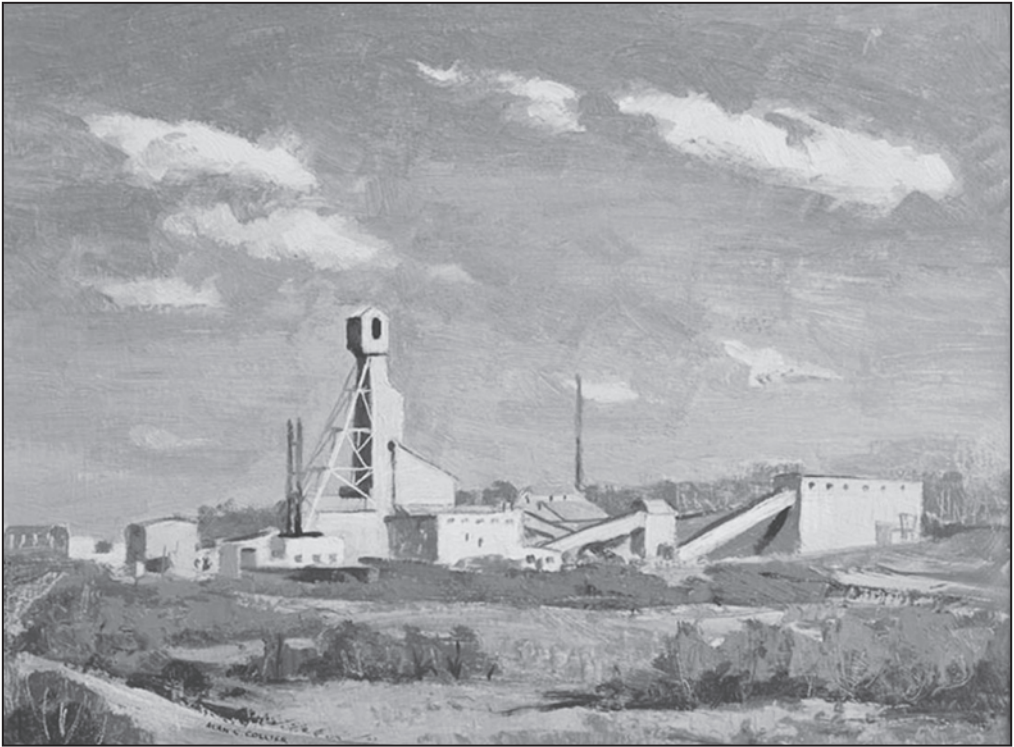


Figure 8: *Campbell Red Lake Mine, Ontario, 25 August 1956, oil on board, 30.5 x 40.6, cm, collection of Andrew Rookley.*

calendar of the Imperial Bank.⁶⁸ He began work on this while in Clinton, B.C., finished it in Prince George, and then expressed the final product for framing to the Roberts Gallery, Toronto, where he was now well established. On the return journey from the West, he did a 30.5 x 40.6 cm sketch of the Campbell Mine at Red Lake, Ontario.⁶⁹ His first studio picture based on his summer travels was a 61 x 76.2 cm picture, *262,000 Gals. of*

Butane-Butelene/Imperial Oil Edmonton Refinery, which was bought by Edgar F. Tolhurst of the Tolhurst Oil Co. Ltd. of Outremont, Quebec, for \$450.⁷⁰ A studio depiction of the Athabasca Glacier found its way via the Roberts Gallery into the office of Crawford Gordon, the head of A.V. Roe Canada, builder of the doomed Avro Arrow.⁷¹ From January to April 1958 his picture *Loading Tank Cars, Edmonton Refinery – Imperial Oil*

⁶⁸ Art Record, B23.

⁶⁹ Art Record, B28/70.

⁷⁰ Art Record, B30.

⁷¹ Art Record, B40. There is a photograph of Gordon's office, with the picture prominently displayed, following this entry.

was shown at the Imperial Oil Building, Toronto.⁷² In March 1958 he sketched in the Blind River/Elliot Lake mining area of Ontario and in May drew on one of the sketches made on this trip at Quirke Lake/Stanrock Bluff (the site of a uranium mine owned by Denison Mines) to produce a 76.2 x 101.6 cm oil painting, *Canada's Mineral Resources*, for Seagram.⁷³ In September 1958 this picture was used by the company in its advertising in national magazines; The Seagram commission typified corporate sponsorship of the arts, writers Stephen Leacock and A.M. Klein having also benefited from this particular patron.

In 1958 Collier received his most lucrative commission to date when he was engaged by the Bank of Canada, for a fee of \$9,000, to provide a mural for its new building on University Avenue, Toronto.⁷⁴ At the same time he worked on a mural for Ryerson Institute of Technology, drawn to a genre that both enhanced his public reputation as an artist and paid well.⁷⁵ The Ryerson mural portrayed the groves of academe (Ian Collier was one of the models), while the Bank of Canada mural was a three-panel invention that drew on themes in Canadian history. His original intention was to show, in separate left to right panels with a human figure in each, "Gold Seekers" in the

Fraser Canyon, "Land Seekers" on the Peace River at its confluence with the Smoky, and "Fur Seekers" in the Laurentians.⁷⁶ But after back and forth with the bank—the work evolved through three sketches—the figures were dropped from the panels and flat Prairie landscape substituted for the Peace River/Smoky backdrop. The finished panels, each measuring 2.49 x 4.37 m, were installed in January 1960 and remain on public view.⁷⁷ In the foreground of the Fraser Canyon panel, tools of the gold rush are shown, and in the background an emblematic modern mine stands out against the mountain landscape. Collier's gift for Canadian landscape is well evident in this mural, but so too is admiration for the economic advance of the country. Nature is celebrated in Collier's art, but also ingenuity and material achievement.

Collier followed up the completion of the Bank of Canada work with a rush job for illustrations for the annual report of the company that operated the Faraday Mine at Bancroft, Ontario. He and fellow artist Bill Roberts visited the site, made numerous felt pen sketches, and took photographs that became colour slides. The result of their effort was a set of six drawings for which the company paid \$600, of which Collier got \$340 and Roberts \$260.⁷⁸ Always the entre-

⁷² Art Record, B87.

⁷³ For his Blind River/Elliot Lake work see Art Record, B90, and for the Seagram picture, B92. The sketch he used for the Seagram picture was of Quirke Lake and Stanrock Bluff (B90/2).

⁷⁴ For this mural see Art Record B94, B112, B131, and B148.

⁷⁵ For the Ryerson mural, which was installed on 12 March 1960, see Art Record, B124 and B130.

⁷⁶ Art Record, B94.

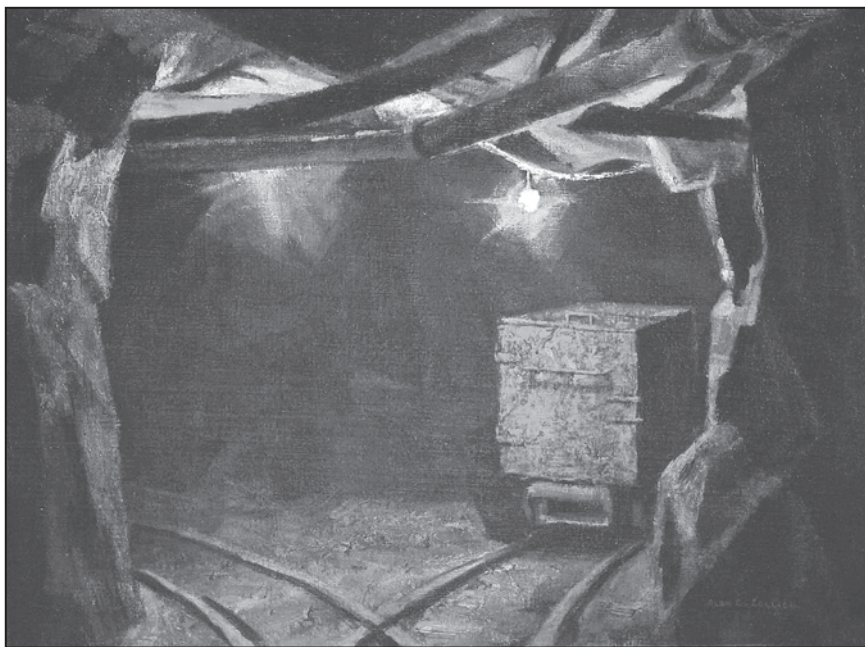
⁷⁷ Art Record, B148.

⁷⁸ Art Record, B154.

Figure 9: Powder Car, May 1966, oil and lucite 44 on canvas, 45.7 x 61 cm, collection of Andrew Rookley.

preneur, Collier was quick to respond to opportunity to show and sell his work—in whatever venue or form.

In 1966 Collier took a year's leave from the OCA and in October went north, first to the mining operation of Coppercorp Mining on Batchawana Bay, Lake Superior, and then to the Kidd Copper Mine in Timmins. In November the twenty sketches he made on this outing were shown at the Toronto office of Sheridan Geophysics, and the entire set may have been acquired by the company—they are all happily marked "sold" in Alan's log.⁷⁹ So successful was Alan during his leave from OCA that in 1967 he gave up his academic post and thereafter made his living as an independent artist—no small achievement in Canada, then or now. A rarity in his field, he had a business plan, understood double-entry bookkeeping, and was adept at market-



ing his work.

In 1968 Collier completed his most impressive mining work, a mural called *Mining in Ontario*, for the Macdonald Block, opened that year as part of the Ontario government complex at Queen's Park, Toronto. The mural was based on a sketch submitted on 7 October 1966 to the art consultant committee for the building project—chaired by Cleeve Horne, with Alan's friends Clare Bice and Peter Howorth as its other members. Measuring 261.6 x 198.1 cm, *Mining in Ontario* showed both surface and underground operations, with a plumb bob symbolizing "the engineering tool" that tied them together.⁸⁰ It was installed in

⁷⁹ Art Record, D103-106 and D197

⁸⁰ For the sketch see Art Record, D102, and for the finished work, E58. The quotation is from a letter, dated 26 November 1970, that Collier wrote to B.J. Mills, Exhibits and Exhibition Branch, Department of Public Works, Queen's Park. I am grateful to Lani Wilson, Curator, Government of Ontario Art Collection, Archives



Figure 10: *Mining in Ontario*, 1968, acrylic emulsion on linen canvas, 261.6 x 198.1 cm, Government of Ontario Art Collection, Archives of Ontario, 61973.

the Copperfields Mine on Temagami Island in Lake Temagami, where geoscientist and prospector Norman Bell Keevil was at the fore, and the Lamaque Mine at Val-d'Or, Quebec.⁸¹ The six sketches Collier made at the Copperfields site and the seven he did at Lamaque are collectively identified in his art log as “the Keevil Group.”⁸² They are indicative of the many doors that his mining interest opened for him.

In the last two decades of his busy life—he died in Toronto on 23 August 1990—Collier concentrated on the landscape work that had long captivated him, and it found a steady market

the hallway on the ground floor of the building on 30 November–1 December 1968. Alan was paid \$2,340 for the work, \$1,425 of it advanced on approval of the sketch. In January 1969, having completed this big job, he headed into mining country again, this time visiting

through the Roberts Gallery and the Kensington Gallery in Calgary. In 1972 he went to the Arctic aboard the Canadian Coast Guard icebreaker *D'Iberville* and in 1978 made a return visit on the *John A. Macdonald*.⁸³ In April 1981 one of his Arctic pictures, *From Snow-Clad*

of Ontario, for a copy of this letter.

⁸¹ For Keevil's career see Norman B. Keevil, *Never Rest On Your Ores: Building a Mining Company One Stone at a Time* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2017).

⁸² For the Copperfield pictures see Art Record, E11, and for the Lamaque pictures, E12–13.

⁸³ For his work on these trips see Art Record, F99–119 (1972) and H46–54 (1978).

Heights, was presented to Dome Canada of Calgary (an offspring of Dome Petroleum) by the Toronto brokerage firm Pitfield Mackay Ross to honour the completion of an initial equity issue—at more than \$400 million the largest to date in Canadian corporate history—on behalf of the Alberta enterprise.⁸⁴ Worked up from a sketch made in Jones Sound near Devon Island on 26 August 1978, the picture had initially been sold to owner Jack Wildridge of the Roberts Gallery for his personal collection.⁸⁵ He in turn sold it to Pitfield Mackay Ross for \$20,000. Collier told the chairman and president of Dome that Wildridge had parted with the picture reluctantly and “only because he knew that it would hang in the one perfect place for it in Canada.”⁸⁶ Reproductions of the picture were distributed to those who had worked on this notable made-in-Canada business deal. On a 1981 visit to Alberta, Collier met up with the ebullient Jack Gallagher, the head of Dome, with whom he became chummy. Closer to home Collier was cultivated over many years by the avid Ottawa collector O.J. (Jack) Firestone, and there are many Collier works in the collection that Firestone and his wife Isobel assembled, which is now in the holdings of the Ottawa Art Gallery.⁸⁷ Collier’s remarkably detailed and extensive papers, donated

to the Queen’s University Archives by Ruth, are a rich source for Canadian cultural and social history.

Alan Collier belonged to a generation of Canadian artists who fell between the fame and glory of the Group of Seven and the largesse of the Canada Council. In realizing his ambition to become an independent artist, he benefited from being the son of a small businessman and well understood the need to cultivate connections and find patrons. The burgeoning mining industry, whose financial centre was Toronto, offered both, and he was quick to recognize and seize the opportunity it presented. The commitment to mining art that helped launch Collier sprang from both personal knowledge of the life and work of miners and from artistic inspiration; his work in the field enhanced his reputation and helped clear his way in life. In the art history of industrial Canada, Collier’s mining pictures are notable for their authenticity and appreciation; his heroic vision of resource extraction is in sharp contrast to that of a later generation of artists—the photographer Edward Burtynsky is a good example—shaped by the environmental movement and the reality of climate change. His social democratic beliefs notwithstanding, Collier’s national

⁸⁴ Art Record, H63. For details of the equity issue see “Brokers go all out to make Dome Canada issue a success,” *Globe and Mail*, 7 March 1981, B5, and “Dome’s daring set up record issue,” *Globe and Mail*, 14 March 1981, B1.

⁸⁵ For the sketch see Art Record, H48/14.

⁸⁶ Collier to J.O. Gallagher (chairman) and W.E. Richards (president), 3 April 1981, in Art Record, following H63.

⁸⁷ For a list of these see *Ontario Heritage Foundation, Firestone Art Collection* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1978), 51-54.

narrative was one of onward and upward progress and engineering triumphalism. Above all, Collier's mining pictures recall the optimism of resource development in the 1950s and 1960s—when many Canadians who had lived through the Great Depression entered the promised land of the affluent society. Collier was himself at once an uncommon but ordinary Canadian—uncommon in his talent but in many other respects an Anglo-Canadian everyman: he lived in relief camps and

bunkhouses in the 1930s, served in uniform in the 1940s, moved to suburbia in the 1950s, and thereafter explored the country driving an automobile and pulling a trailer. In his attachment to being behind the wheel and to long-distance family road trips, he heralded big-carbon-footprint Canada—a freewheeling time before the green and Indigenous reckonings to come. His mining art recalls an expansive boom period in the history of Canadian industry.
