

military post only 38 years before — and membership was drawn entirely from the moneyed class, gentlemen who considered the casual pursuit of water-colour painting in the British manner to be part of civilized life. This privileged society encouraged the settlement of Halifax's first resident professional artist, Robert Field (c. 1769-1819), an Englishman who had studied at the Royal Academy School in London before emigrating to the United States in 1794. Working throughout the eastern seaboard as a miniaturist, and as a portrait painter in the manner of Reynolds and Romney, the English masters of his youth, Field lived in Halifax from 1808 until 1816, by which time he had exhausted the local market. He then moved to Kingston, Jamaica.

Field's work is valued as a record of the early leaders of the Halifax community. Although it is only one of many provincial manifestations of the dominant English portrait style to be found throughout the British Empire, it reflects the desire of the local gentry to maintain meaningful links with the visual culture of the metropolitan centre. How unrealistic such aspirations were at the time is clear from the fact that the Halifax Chess, Pencil and Brush Club ceased to meet in 1817, shortly after Field's departure.

The situation was no better elsewhere in British North America in the early decades of the nineteenth century, despite the occasional talented painter such as William Berczy (1744-1813), who found himself in the colonies; he arrived as a leader of German settlers in Upper Canada in 1794, but ended up working as a painter and architect in Montreal and Quebec when land speculations soured. A small, scattered population in the wilderness could not support resident professional artists, although numerous strong, decorative portraits of the 1820s and 1830s have survived. Somewhat naive, with clear forms and intense patterning, they display a genuine vigour. Usually the work of itinerants who would settle in the larger communities for a month or two, they contributed little toward the development of indigenous structures for the arts.

Early watercolours

Other than the portraiture of itinerants and the decorating of churches in Lower Canada (Quebec), the other prominent artistic activity was the habit of "taking views" in the picturesque tradition favoured by well-bred Englishmen. Officers in the imperial army and navy were trained in topography and many pursued it as a serious hobby while posted in Canada. Lieutenant-Colonel James Cockburn (1779-1847), for instance, has left hundreds of charming watercolours of his travels throughout Upper and Lower Canada during a ten-year posting to Quebec City in the late 1820s and early 1830s. There were serious watercolourists among the civilians as well. George Heriot (1759-1839), who lived in Quebec City from 1791 to 1816 — as deputy postmaster-general for