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Tribute to A.Y. Jackson, patriarch of the Group of Seven

A.Y. Jackson, the last surviving member of Canadian painters known as the Group of Seven, died at Kleinberg, Ontario on April 5 at the age of 91.

"Alex" to his friends, "A.Y." to critics and collectors, Alexander Young Jackson was buried in the grounds of McMichael Gallery, near Kleinberg, where Lawren Harris, Arthur Lismer and Frederick Varley, also members of the original Group, are buried. Others in the Group which was formed about 1920 were J.E.H. MacDonald, Franz Johnston and Frank Carmichael. During the 1920s, these artists represented the most *avant-garde* and revolutionary artistic movement in the history of Canadian painting.

Born in Montreal, Jackson began work at the age of 12 as an office boy in a lithographing company and rose quickly to the rank of designer. He took evening courses in painting at le Monument National and went as often as possible into the countryside around Montreal to sketch. In Quebec, he was called "le père Raquette" when he used to criss-cross the region of the North Coast with his sketch box. He painted tirelessly in all seasons and in any weather. His subjects were the farms, the countryside and the hills of Charlevoix county.

Influence of others

He admired passionately the works of such controversial painters of the period as Maurice Cullen (1866-1934) and James Wilson Morrice and he acknowledged later in his autobiography *A Painter's Country*, the influence these artists had on his work. Following their example he went to Paris to the Académie Julian for artistic instruction. During the period from 1905 to 1911 A.Y. Jackson visited Europe three times, spending as long as two-and-a-half years there at a stretch.

In the Ontario Society of Artists exhibition in Toronto in 1911 he showed a work that would decide his future for the next several years. This painting caught the attention of Lawren Harris who, two years later introduced



A.Y. Jackson

him into the circle of young Toronto painters, who had been called by a critic "The Hot Mush School". Thus, besides Lawren Harris, J.E.H. MacDonald, Frederick Varley and Arthur Lismer, he met Tom Thomson, who showed them the way northward.

In 1914, A.Y. Jackson established himself at Toronto where he shared a studio with Tom Thomson. The young painter, just back from Europe, heard for the first time Thomson talk enthusiastically about the lakes, forests and rivers of the Canadian North.

From that time on Jackson's program was the same as the other artists in the Group of Seven. He painted scenes of Georgian Bay, Algonquin Park, the Rockies and Algoma.

During the Second World War, Jackson enlisted as an infantryman. After being wounded in France he worked as an artist and was preparing for an assignment in Siberia when the war ended.

Group's first exhibition

When he returned to Toronto in 1918, he again associated himself with the artists of the Group, travelling the paths of the northern wilderness. The death of Thomson tightened the bonds