

The exhibition and sale of members' pictures was the primary concern of the OSA, although it was soon involved in establishing a gallery and an art school. There was already a small art gallery of sorts in Toronto, the Canadian Educational Museum, located in the Toronto Normal School since 1857, which contained a collection of plaster casts, oil copies and reproductive engravings of the great masterpieces of European visual culture. What the OSA had in mind, however, was a permanent public display of the work of the community's artists. Problems of personality and organization developed during the first year, and John Fraser was replaced by Lucius O'Brien (1832-99), a masterful organizer with a clear view of long term goals. By June 1876 he had established the OSA in its own quarters in the heart of the city, and had by the fall established a school of art under the Society's auspices. It survives to this day as the Ontario College of Art.

National beginnings

Things were improving in Montreal as well, and in May 1879 the AAM opened the first structure in Canada designed specifically as a public art gallery. Montreal was prepared to vie with Toronto for any claim to national predominance in the arts. And other cities, if not in competition, were ready to declare their intentions to pursue their own artistic goals. A group of collectors in Ottawa formed the Art Association of Canada in the summer of 1879, soon to be re-named the Ottawa Art Association. Local interests in London, Ontario, had formed the Western Art Union in 1877, and there would soon be a similar body in Winnipeg in the new province of Manitoba, and a bit later one in Saint John, New Brunswick.

Recognizing the potential for confusion amidst these overlapping claims, Lord Dufferin, the governor general, began early in 1877 to raise in public speeches the subject of a real national gallery and national artistic association along the lines of the Royal Academy in London. His successor, the Marquis of Lorne, who pursued the matter forcefully, in 1879 asked both the OSA and the AAM to draw up recommendations for the foundation of a Royal Canadian Academy of Arts (RCA). Each at first believed it had been chosen to be transformed into this august national body, but Lorne soon made it clear that the RCA would embrace the whole Dominion, leaving existing associations and societies intact. He personally chose Lucius O'Brien to be president, with Napoléon Bourassa of Montreal as vice-president, and the inaugural exhibition opened in the national capital, Ottawa, in March 1880. The entire exhibition was subsequently shown in the AAM galleries, and a reduced version was included in the OSA exhibition in Toronto. Although it was planned to exhibit in a different city each year, the tradition was soon