

## **Gender, Race, and Nation in *Tableau Representing Great Britain and Her Colonies***

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Volume 44, Number 2, 2019

Stay Still: Past, Present, and Practice of the Tableau Vivant  
Stay Still : histoire, actualité et pratique du tableau vivant

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1068318ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1068318ar>

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### Publisher(s)

UAAC-AAUC (University Art Association of Canada | Association d'art des universités du Canada)

### ISSN

0315-9906 (print)

1918-4778 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

### Cite this article

Contogouris, E. (2019). Gender, Race, and Nation in *Tableau Representing Great Britain and Her Colonies*. *RACAR : Revue d'art canadienne / Canadian Art Review*, 44(2), 65–78. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1068318ar>

### Article abstract

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# Gender, Race, and Nation in *Tableau Representing Great Britain and Her Colonies*

Ersy Contogouris

Le 15 février 1900 avait lieu à Dawson au Yukon un concert bénéfique pour venir en aide aux familles de soldats canadiens morts pendant la Guerre d’Afrique du Sud. Pendant ce concert fut présenté un tableau vivant mettant en scène environ trente-cinq femmes, hommes et enfants, costumés et en *blackface*, qui incarnaient la Grande-Bretagne et ses colonies. Cet article propose une première lecture détaillée de ce tableau vivant pris en photo par le duo de photographes Larss et Duclos. L’analyse de ce double objet d’étude (le tableau vivant et la photo du tableau vivant) démontre que ce qui peut paraître à première vue comme une représentation anodine et quelque peu excentrique d’une performance amateur au Yukon au tournant du xx<sup>e</sup> siècle se révèle au contraire comme un marqueur et un vecteur des processus liés de la colonisation du nord-ouest du Canada et de la construction nationale du jeune pays, et que les femmes jouèrent un rôle central dans ces processus liés.

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1. Martha Langford, *Suspended Conversations: The Afterlife of Memory in Photographic Albums* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2008), 139.

Thirty-five or so women, men, and children wearing costume and make-up—a considerable cast—have crowded onto a small stage to perform an allegorical tableau vivant. They are organized into a pyramid with a large base, at the apex of which stands Britannia, above the other figures, holding her characteristic trident and shield. Britannia is flanked by figures representing the forces of order: a Mountie to her left and a member of the military to her right, as well as a third, on the other side of the soldier, in blackface and wearing a costume that is indecipherable given the size, resolution, and lighting of the photograph. Right below them, three young women who represent England, Scotland, and Wales, and then more, but unreadable, personifications of countries to the left and right, some in blackface, men wearing Mountie and military uniforms, and some children sitting or reclining on the floor. Spectators watch the scene from loges to the left and right of the stage, while two rows of musicians can be seen in the pit. | **fig. 1** |

The title of the performance and circumstances of the event are given to us by an inscription at the bottom of the image—*Tableau Representing Great Britain and Her Colonies at a Concert Given in Aid of the Widows and Orphans Created by the War with the Transvaal*—which also informs us that the photo was taken by the duo Larss & Duclos at the Palace Grand Theatre in Dawson, Yukon, on February 15, 1900. The inscription bears the number 2568, in keeping with the photographers’ numbering system, as well as the information “Flash Light Photo,” a detail that alerts us to the technical prowess involved in taking the photograph. It is difficult to ascertain from what exact spot in the theatre the photograph was taken. A photo of a concert held at the Palace Grand ca. 1898 in honour of George Washington’s birthday shows the hall as rather vast, which suggests that the photographers might have stood on a contraption in the middle of the seating area built especially for the event in February 1900. | **fig. 2** | The tableau vivant, by its very immobility, made it a perfect subject for such a photograph given the technical limitations of the medium at the time.

*Tableau Representing Great Britain and Her Colonies*, which the photography historian Martha Langford has described as “a tour de force on any scale, photographic, political, or musical,”<sup>1</sup> has yet to be examined in any detail. This article proposes one such study, specifically in relation to issues of colonialism and gender. What I will argue in this analysis of this dual object of study—the tableau vivant and the photograph of the tableau vivant—is that what might

first appear as an anodyne and slightly quirky representation of an amateur performance in the Yukon at the turn of the twentieth century can be understood as both a marker and a vector of nation building and settler colonialism, and that women played a central role in these linked processes. In order to do so, I will first set the stage (as it were) by summing up the geopolitical context that forms the backdrop of this performance, first by looking at Canada's participation in the South African War,<sup>2</sup> and then at the specific circumstances in Dawson. I will then turn to the image itself: after examining the photograph of the tableau vivant, I will analyze the spaces of the tableau and of the photograph, and, lastly, the role played by women.

### Canada and the South African War

In 1900, Britain was well into what has been termed its imperial century: the hundred years between the fall of Napoleon and the beginning of the First World War, during which it became the main global hegemonic power. Its interests in the South African region were basically threefold: the route toward India via the Cape; the significant deposits of diamond and gold discovered respectively in 1868 and 1886 (the latter specifically in the Transvaal region); and the general context of the late-nineteenth-century Scramble for Africa, the division of the African continent among different European colonial powers. A combination of these elements led to a series of conflicts at the turn of the twentieth century, including the South African War in the Transvaal, which opposed the British to the Boers,<sup>3</sup> from October 11, 1899 to May 31, 1902.

As the imminence of the war in South Africa was beginning to be felt around the world, a vociferous debate erupted in Canada—defined as such for only about thirty years—regarding the need or not to send troops to South Africa. For many English Canadians, considered British subjects, the desire to join the war effort stemmed from a general feeling of solidarity with the British and/or a desire to reaffirm Canada's loyalty to the crown. For others, fighting alongside Britain represented a chance to make significant monetary gains from war contracts. It was also seen as an opportunity for Canada to eschew its status as a colony by coming to the help of the crown and even to become an imperial power in its own right and to partake in the riches that could be plundered in South Africa. It was argued, using heavily gendered language, that it was time for Canada to become a man and sit down at the table with the other men.<sup>4</sup>

As Canada was preparing for a federal election, part of the Anglophone press, led by *The Montreal Star*, began to push Sir Wilfrid Laurier's Liberal government toward intervening in the war. They used "fake news" tactics, alleging that the Boers were brutally massacring British women and children living in the Transvaal. The *Star* mostly reduced the debate to a conflict between French and English Canadians. At a moment when other colonies had already pledged to send help, the newspaper argued, it was only because Laurier sought the French-Canadian vote that he was hesitating to send troops. It accused Laurier of thus capitulating before pressures of what it called the "insignificant" minority of French Canadians.<sup>5</sup> By October 1899, the crisis around Canada's participation in the South African War had reached such acrimoniousness that the *Star* accused Laurier of treachery.<sup>6</sup>

2. Carman Miller and other historians prefer the term South African War to Anglo-Boer War or Second Boer War, as those latter terms efface the "large number of armed and non-armed Black participants" and present it as simply a "white man's war." Carman Miller, *Canada's Little War: Fighting for the British Empire in Southern Africa 1899–1902* (Toronto: James Lorimer & Co., 2003), 8.

3. The Boers were the descendants of the first colonizers—Dutch, Germans, and the Huguenots who had been chased out of France—who had landed in South Africa in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. They would become known as the Afrikaners in the twentieth century.

4. I am indebted to Carman Miller's outline of the issues in *Painting the Map Red: Canada and the South African War, 1899–1902* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1993), and *Canada's Little War*.

5. Miller, *Canada's Little War*, 13.

6. See Dominic Hardy, "Drawn to Order: Henri Julien's Political Cartoons of 1899 and His Career with Hugh Graham's Montreal Daily Star" (MA thesis, Trent University, 1997), 138, and H. Blair Neatby, "Laurier and Imperialism," *The Canadian Historical Association / La société historique du Canada*, 34, no. 1 (1955): 24–32.



Figure 1. Larss & Duclos, *Tableau Representing Great Britain and Her Colonies at a Concert Given in Aid of the Widows and Orphans Created by the War with the Transvaal*, Palace Grand, Feb 15th, 1900, 1900. Silver salts on paper mounted on paper—Gelatin silver process, 15 × 20 cm. Gift of the Wright Family. Montreal, McCord Museum (MP-0000.2360.18).



Figure 2. Larss & Duclos, *Concert for George Washington's Birthday*, Dawson City, VT, ca. 1898. Silver salts on paper mounted on paper—Gelatin silver process, 15 × 19.5 cm. Montreal, McCord Museum (MP-0000.2360.3).

It was true that many French Canadians opposed Canada sending troops to South Africa. Some sympathized with the Boers' wish for independence. Others feared that British imperialism in South Africa would be a prelude to a tightening of Britain's grip on its possessions worldwide, including Canada, and that this would be a step back in relation to the way Canada was evolving as a nation. And there was concern, too, that it might represent a step toward linguistic (English) and religious (Protestantism) hegemony.<sup>7</sup>

But, in reality, the division between French- and English-Canadian public opinion was not so neatly drawn, nor was either community so monolithic. Opinions were divided: many members of both communities were rather indifferent to Canada's participation in the war, did not feel directly affected by the conflict, or were preoccupied by issues closer to home. Some worried that a precedent would be created whereby the British would expect Canada to contribute troops and resources in every conflict in which they found themselves embroiled. Others held religious or politically radical views that led them to oppose Canada's entry into the war.

Some English- and French-Canadians also shared concerns about the country's northwestern area. The Yukon was not clearly a Canadian possession in 1899, the issue of the frontier with Alaska was not yet resolved, and there was anxiety about US imperialism expanding into Canadian territory. Some English- and French-Canadians argued that troops were needed at home both to defend the border and to continue to "develop" the Canadian northwest.<sup>8</sup> In the end, Canada sent over 7000 volunteers to South Africa in support of the British, of which 267 were killed.<sup>9</sup>

The issues of Canada's internal and external self-definition in 1900, the year our *tableau vivant* was staged, were therefore intimately linked. The period represents a decisive moment in Canada's history, as the country was in the process of establishing its borders, redefining its relationship to Britain, and determining its position in the world. And Dawson was one of the crucial battlegrounds where this process was being played out.

#### Dawson, ca. 1900

Expanding into and gaining control of the northwest of the continent was part and parcel of the new Canadian state's self-definition. Following the failure of the Joint High Commission in the closing years of the nineteenth century to settle the issue of the Alaskan boundary,<sup>10</sup> the question of the definition of Canadian territory in the northwest became particularly pressing.<sup>11</sup> The first gold strikes in the territory in the winter of 1886–87 had meant that the Canadian government wanted to establish firm jurisdiction over the area. The Yukon Gold Rush was, in large part, the means by which this was achieved.<sup>12</sup>

1896 marked the beginning of the gold rush, when Keish (known as Skookum Jim; 1855–1916) and his sister Shaaw Tláa (Kate Carmack; 1862–1920)—members of the Tagish Nation—along with their nephew Káa Goox (Tagish Charlie; ca. 1865–1908) and Shaaw Tláa's non-Indigenous husband George Carmack (1860–1922) "discovered" gold in Rabbit Creek, one of the Klondike river's tributaries.<sup>13</sup> The ensuing gold rush brought over 100,000 people to the area, mostly from the US, which was in the throes of a severe economic crisis, and where the dream of the Frontier had been replaced by

7. Miller, *Canada's Little War*, 15.

8. Miller, *Canada's Little War*, 15–16.

9. Canadian War Museum, "Canada and the South African War, 1899–1902," [https://www.warmuseum.ca/cwm/exhibitions/boer/boerwarhistory\\_e.html](https://www.warmuseum.ca/cwm/exhibitions/boer/boerwarhistory_e.html).

10. For contemporaneous accounts, see Anonymous ("A Canadian Liberal"), "The Anglo-American Joint Commission," *The North American Review* 167, no. 501 (August 1898): 165–75, and Lawrence J. Burpee, "Canada and the Joint High Commission," *The North American Review* 181, no. 587 (October 1905): 555–67.

11. These issues are still not resolved, especially as glaciers melt and the North gains in strategic importance. On May 6, 2019, the US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo issued a statement declaring Canada's claim to the Northwest passage "illegitimate."

12. As the anthropologist Julie Cruikshank has noted, "the most permanent effect of the gold rush was a new regional infrastructure, comprising forms of legal, political, economic, and social administration that continue to have far-reaching consequences for everyone living in the Yukon." Julie Cruikshank, "Images of Society in Klondike Gold Rush Narratives: Skookum Jim and the Discovery of Gold," *Ethnohistory* 39, no. 1 (Winter 1992): 20–41, 25.

13. Cruikshank, "Images of Society." As Cruikshank notes, "written accounts from official gold rush literature" differ from "oral accounts passed on by Tagish participants" (Cruikshank, 20).



that of becoming rich through prospecting. It was also in 1896 that the prospector Joseph Ladue (1855–1901) founded the nearby city of Dawson, which grew to 500 inhabitants within a few months and to over 40,000 by 1898. Not everyone who was going to Dawson was hoping to find gold; many moved there for what seemed like good business opportunities around the prospecting boom. This meant the creation of an infrastructure, a police force, hotels, restaurants, bars, brothels, laundries, etc., as well as industries such as newspaper publishing and photography.

Photography became an important tool not only in the process of documenting the gold rush but also, more generally, in that of consolidating the appropriation of land by white colonizers.<sup>14</sup> Many photographers who went to the area doubled as prospectors, as is the case of Per Edvard Larss and Joseph E.N. Duclos, who took the photograph of *Tableau Representing Great Britain and Her Colonies*. Larss (1863–1941) had come to the United States from Sweden with his family in 1881, when he was 18 years old.<sup>15</sup> He had begun working in photography in Minneapolis before moving northward, to Nanaimo, British Columbia, in 1892, then up to Alaska when the gold rush began, where he worked with the photographer Eric A. Hegg (1867–1947)—also a prospector and gold rush photographer of Swedish origin, who had arrived in Skagway, Alaska, in 1897. Duclos (1863–1917), originally from Quebec, had learned photography in Maine, then moved to Dawson in 1898, where he also worked for Hegg.<sup>16</sup> After Hegg left them his photography firm, they founded the firm Larss & Duclos on April 1, 1899, which was dissolved in 1904, when Larss moved to Colorado.

The Klondike Gold Rush was not to last long. By the summer of 1898, the stampedeers arriving in the area were already disappointed by the meagre findings.<sup>17</sup> In the winter of 1899, reports that gold had been discovered in nearby Nome, Alaska, created an exodus from Dawson, whose population quickly fell back to 8,000 within a few months. By early 1900, then, when our tableau vivant was performed, most of the people in Dawson (and here specifically, the performers and the audience) were not just prospectors passing by on their way to enriching themselves. They were the people who had decided to stay in Dawson, to settle the land. By then, Dawson could offer its residents habitual Western cultural institutions, such as a philharmonic orchestra, as well as sites of leisure, including the Palace Grand Theatre.<sup>18</sup> The transformation was such that in November 1899, the *Dawson Daily News* reported that Dawson now displayed “the enervating luxuries of a gay metropolis.”<sup>19</sup> The Palace Grand, which could seat up to five hundred spectators, was a combination of European opera house and dance hall. It had been built in 1899 by Arizona Charlie (ca. 1859–1932), a showman who had travelled around the world in Wild West shows, including with Buffalo Bill, and had moved to the Yukon in 1897.

Arizona Charlie also created the short-lived *Klondike News*, a vanity newspaper that only appeared in one edition but nevertheless made him \$50,000 and that is but one of the many newspapers that were produced in Dawson at the turn of the century.<sup>20</sup> This vitality can be explained—partly at least—by the fact that newspapers at once mirrored and fed into the social tensions in Dawson at the time. Canadian historian Edward F. Bush has recounted the

14. The role of photography in the colonizing process has been discussed at length. See for instance Elizabeth Anne Cavaliere, “Onward! Canadian Expansionist Outlooks and the Photographs that Serve Them,” *RACAR* 41, no. 1 (2016): 76–84, and Andrea Kunard, “Relationships of Photography and Text in the Colonization of the Canadian West: The 1858 Assiniboine and Saskatchewan Exploring Expedition,” *International Journal of Canadian Studies* 26 (2002): 77–100. For ways in which photography has been used as a method of de-colonization, see Celeste Pedri-Spade, “‘But they were never only the master’s tools’: The Use of Photography in De-Colonial Praxis,” *AlterNative*, 13, no. 2 (2017): 106–13.

15. P.E. Larss Photograph Collection, 1898–1904, Alaska State Library, <https://researchworks.oclc.org/archivegrid/collection/data/52864350>.

16. Canadian Heritage Information Network, “Portraits of an Era – Larss and Duclos,” 2009, <http://www.virtualmuseum.ca/edu/ViewLoitLo.do?jsessionid=8DC13FF-076D597AEBF17FF29B35BFED8?method=preview&lang=EN&id=7542>.

17. Anonymous, “The Newcomer in Dawson,” *Klondike Nugget*, June 1898.

18. For more on the Palace Grand Theatre and the man who built it, Charles “Arizona Charlie” Meadows, see Dan L. Thrapp, “Meadows, Charlie (Arizona Charlie),” *Encyclopedia of Frontier Biography*, 3 vols. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1981), vol. 2, 964–65, and Michel Gates, “The Grand Old Theatre and the Man Behind It,” *Yukon News*, October 28, 2011.

19. Quoted in Edward F. Bush, “The Dawson Daily News: Journalism in the Klondike,” *Canadian Historic Sites: Occasional Papers in Archaeology and History* no. 21 (Ottawa: Canadian Historic Sites / Parks Canada, 1979), 92.

20. Gates, “Grand Old Theatre.” Apart from the *Klondike News*, which he does not mention in his article on newspaper publishing in Dawson at the turn of the century, Edward Bush traces the fortunes of nine newspapers that were started between 1898 and 1909, five of which were started in 1898 or 1899.

journalistic rivalry that transpired in Dawson ca. 1900, the two main proponents of which were the pro-Canada *Yukon Midnight Sun* and the pro-US *Klondike Nugget*, both created in 1898.<sup>21</sup> The exact demographic composition of Dawson at this time is unknown,<sup>22</sup> but while the *Sun* supported the Canadian government's incursions—tax levies, etc.—into the region, the *Nugget* presented itself as the champion of US citizens and denounced what it described as the repression exercised by the Canadian state.

The *Sun*'s first editor, Henry Joseph Woodside (1858–1929), is an archetype of the Canadian colonist whose activities in defense of the British crown ranged from ensuring the settlement of the land to volunteering for the South African War. Woodside was an ultra-royalist. He was born in Ontario and had moved westward, to Portage la Prairie in Manitoba, where he worked for the *Manitoba Liberal* and served in the Canadian militia during the repression of the North-West Rebellion of 1885 that resulted in the death of the Métis leader Louis Riel (1844–85). He continued northwestward and arrived in Yukon in the early 1890s, where he served as the census enumerator. While in Dawson, he also took photographs that document the gold rush.<sup>23</sup> At century's end, he volunteered to join a Canadian regiment and went to serve in the South African War. In the case of someone like Woodside, then, the embeddedness of the settlement of the Northwest, repression of Indigenous peoples, pro-British sentiment, and support of Canadian intervention in the South African War is apparent.<sup>24</sup>

The South African War became a litmus test to prove one's Canadianness. As Bush argues, "charges of 'alien' were freely bandied about by the Canadian and British-born minority" against anyone who did not declare themselves in favour of Canadian intervention on the side of the British.<sup>25</sup> Here, we find the same us-and-them rhetoric that had been used to drum up support for the war elsewhere in the country. The vitriol in the Dawson newspapers testifies to the polarizing effect of the South African War: on February 13, 1900, two days before the concert was held in support of the families affected by the South African War, "the *Nugget* snidely reminded Woodside that there were still a few Boers left unkilld in the Transvaal."<sup>26</sup>

### The Tableau

None of the rancour and hostility expressed in the newspapers is visible in our tableau, which presents us instead with a stable and harmonious community, qualities rendered visible by the strikingly symmetrical and pyramidal construction. We might imagine that this performed concord expresses a desire for harmony and stability as much in the British Empire (engaged in war) as in Dawson. Besides the placement of the figures, the enormous flag that serves as a backdrop to the scene further unifies the composition. The way the flag does not quite fit the stage reminds us that this is an amateur performance, as do the costumes worn by the figures and the props they hold.

While Britannia stands above her subjects, she is not posed triumphantly. She does not hold her trident high up above her head as in other depictions of similar subjects. Her gaze is turned downward, which suggests either a sense of humility or perhaps—and this is the difficulty inherent in trying to read a grainy photograph of a performance by amateurs of which there remains no

21. Bush, "The Dawson Daily News." Different newspapers targeted different social groups: the *Klondike Miner* and *Yukon Advertiser*, for instance, was intended for miners, while the *Free Lance* aimed for a wider audience and presented itself as the "family paper of the Yukon" (Bush, 73).

22. Traditional estimates have indicated that the overwhelming majority (up to 80%) of Dawsonians were US citizens. More recently, however, the historian Charlene Porsild has argued that the number was closer to 40%, and that a similar proportion of Dawson residents were Canadian or British. The last 20% was made up of people from around forty countries other than Canada, Britain, or the US. Nevertheless, Porsild shows, the US residents perceived themselves as the overwhelming, and oppressed, majority. Charlene Porsild, *Gamblers and Dreamers: Women, Men, and Community in the Klondike* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1998), 17, 201–204.

23. Many of these have now become iconic. See Skagway Stories, "Major Henry Joseph Woodside," 2010, <http://www.skagwaystories.org/2010/02/25/major-henry-j-woodside/>.

24. Other examples include Lieutenant-Colonel Thomas D. B. Evans (1860–1908), who headed the Yukon Field Force and who led a battalion of the Canadian Mounted Rifles in South Africa; and Lieutenant-Colonel Samuel B. Steele (1849–1919), officer of the North-West Mounted Police, head of the Yukon detachment during the Klondike Gold Rush, and commanding officer of Lord Strathcona's Horse in the South African War.

25. Bush, "Dawson Daily News," 97.

26. *Ibid.*

Figure 3. James Neagle, after Robert Smirke, *Britannia*, ca. 1805. Etching and engraving, 22.6 × 28.3 cm. London, British Museum (1875,0710.3886). © The Trustees of the British Museum.



Figure 4. Unknown photographer, *Tableau vivant*, presumably Queen Victoria with her colonial subjects, ca. 1898. Gelatin silver print, 18.8 × 25 cm. Collection Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen, Amsterdam. Coll.no. TM-60025539.







Figure 5. Walter Crane, *Imperial Federation—Map of the World Showing the Extent of the British Empire in 1886*. Colour supplement for *The Graphic*, 63 × 86 cm. Boston, Boston Public Library. Courtesy of the Norman B. Leventhal Map & Education Center at the Boston Public Library.

written record—she is looking protectively at her subjects. Allegorical images of Britannia in a colonial setting were common throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, particularly given Britain’s status as an imperial power. But the Dawson tableau’s Britannia is different. She is not the “rule Britannia” type who sits imperiously on a throne. | **fig. 3** | The figures in the scene are not overtly acknowledging her, nor is any action directed toward her, as we can see in the photograph of a tableau vivant believed to have been performed around 1898 in Penang, an island off the coast of Malaysia, which shows Queen Victoria with her colonial subjects. | **fig. 4** | Although the main figure embodies the queen and not an allegory, this comparison is useful in that it highlights the more understated aspect of the Dawson tableau, while also providing an example of the different ways in which tableaux vivants played a role in the process of colonization.

Another group of visual representations to which we might relate our tableau vivant are maps produced around the same time that represent Britain’s monopoly over the world. In *Imperial Federation Map of the World Showing the Extent of the British Empire in 1886*, Britannia is seated and surrounded by a variety of figure: a sailor, a soldier, and a host of allegorical figures representing continents, colonies, and abstract concepts. | **fig. 5** |

There are several other notable differences when we compare the Dawson tableau to these other representations. The allegorical figures are not immediately identifiable in our tableau. This can be explained by the quality of the photograph, but also by the amateur nature of the performance and the fact that the organizers must have had to compose with very limited materials. What is more, the community that is represented in this tableau is one in which the presence of the military and the police is prevalent and the Indigenous presence has been completely effaced. This relates, I will argue, to the way in which the white settlers who populate the scene envisioned both the Dawson community and Canada’s place in the British empire.

### The Spaces of the Tableau

I believe that this congruity between visions for the Dawson community and the British empire is evinced by the continuity between the spaces shown in the photograph, and that these serve to paper over, in a way, the fissures in the community. The photograph shows not only the stage on which the allegorical tableau is performed, but also the orchestra pit and some loges. The image could have been reframed to focus solely on the tableau vivant. The effect of having all these spaces reproduced in the photograph is to show a continuity, a sense of communal belonging of the different groups of people represented here: performers, musicians, and spectators. We are reminded that the spectators present belonged to the same community as the performers and might very possibly have known them personally.<sup>27</sup>

Within the tableau as well, there is a sense in which different spaces and categories of figurants are brought together. Apart from the allegorical figures that represent countries around the globe, we see men dressed in uniforms of the Yukon Field Force and of the North-West Mounted Police. These would not have been created specifically for the tableau vivant; they are the uniforms that the men in charge of ensuring the settlement of the Canadian

27. The US community in Dawson held its own celebration a week later at the Palace Grand in honour of George Washington’s birthday. The image reproduced as figure 2 here, which the McCord dates ca. 1898, might be a photograph of this event.

Northwest would have worn in the streets. Bringing together these different types of performers in the tableau enacts a continuity between the space of the stage and the space outside the Palace Grand, a blurring of boundaries between allegorical and real—and between British empire and Canadian colonization—that might help solidify the message of stability that the tableau vivant aims to communicate. Both forces were recent additions to Dawson society.

The Yukon Field Force (YFF) had been created in 1898 specifically in response to the Klondike Gold Rush. | **fig. 6** | It consisted of 203 men who were serving in the Permanent Active Militia (the ancestor of the Canadian Army). The YFF was sent to the Yukon to support the North-West Mounted Police (NWMP). Its main purpose was to protect the region from US annexation; if necessary, it was also to assist the NWMP with law and order.<sup>28</sup> By 1899, the fear of annexation had lessened; the YFF was halved, and many of the men volunteered or were sent to the Transvaal. The rest of the YFF was dismantled in June 1900.

The North-West Mounted Police (NWMP) was created in 1873 by Prime Minister John A. Macdonald to establish dominion over the North-West Territories, assert control over Indigenous peoples, and enforce Canadian law in the West. | **fig. 7** | Because their mission was also to control alcohol sales throughout the territory, they were sent to the Yukon in 1894 to keep a check on the sudden influx of people and sellers of alcohol in the area. There were plans to close the NWMP down in 1896, but it gained new importance following the discovery of gold in the Klondike that year. They sent volunteers to fight alongside the British in the South African War and, as recognition, were renamed the Royal North-West Mounted Police in 1904. In 1920, they were amalgamated with the Dominion Police and became the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, whose distinctive uniform, with its red serge tunic and light brown campaign hat, is now seen as a sort of symbol of Canadian identity.<sup>29</sup> At its very origin, then, this organization had a dual function in the Yukon: to facilitate the settlement of the region by white Canadians and to protect the territory from US encroachment; in other words, to defend the dominion from both domestic and foreign threats.

The NWMP and YFF are represented in the tableau vivant to the immediate left and right of Britannia and along the periphery of the tableau, forming a V whose apex is Britannia. They are at once subservient to Britannia and supporting her; they ensure the stability of the empire and safeguard its borders, and they offer protection for those within their enclave. Symbolically, the protective arms formed by the YFF and NWMP extend to the Dawson community outside, represented in the photo by the spectators in the loges (and, by extension, us). This amalgamation of the allegorical figures of the tableau vivant and the members of the YFF and NWMP embodies the interconnection between the formation of Canada, which involved the expulsion of Indigenous peoples from their lands; the protection of the Canadian border from US encroachment; and the establishment of Canada on the international scene. It is the affirmation of a wish for—and the performance of—a stable society, with a protected enclosure and a harmonious, selective community living within it.

28. Brereton Greenhous, *Guarding the Goldfields: The Story of the Yukon Field Force* (Toronto: Dundurn, 1987), 21–22.

29. Government of Canada, “Unofficial Symbols of Canada,” Aug 15, 2017. <https://www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/services/unofficial-symbols-canada.html>. The hundreds of tourist postcards featuring RCMP officers—mounted or not—attest to this.

**Figure 6.** Henry Joseph Woodside, *Yukon Field Force Garrison, Dawson, Yukon, 1900.* Photograph, 6 x 9 cm. Ottawa, Library Archives Canada (FA-265).



**Figure 7.** Unknown photographer, *North West Mounted Police Officers Group, 1900.* Silver salts on paper, mounted on paper. Montreal, McCord Museum (II-138372.0.1).





But the vision of harmony and stability thus performed in *Tableau Representing Great Britain and Her Colonies* excludes as much as it includes. It excludes, most clearly, the Indigenous Peoples who are absent from this tableau vivant, outside the “protective” zone formed by the YTT and NWMP, and whose existence and way of life were irrevocably transformed by colonization. In particular, the Tr’ondëk Hwëch’in (Hän) First Nation was driven away from the area, which had been rich in caribou and salmon stocks. They are made absent from the stable and harmonious image that the tableau seeks to project.

### The Women in the Tableau

While the NWMP and YFF might secure the boundaries of the ideal society represented in *Tableau Representing Great Britain and Her Colonies*, the women, although they are a minority of the performers on stage, play a significant role. They form a strong vertical central pillar that is all the more emphasized by the pale colour of the dresses they wear.

There is a centuries-long tradition in the history of art of showing women as allegorical figures, and especially as embodiments of nations.<sup>30</sup> There is also an important gendered dimension—embodied specifically by the white, middle-class woman—in the history and practice of the tableau vivant. Writing about amateur tableaux vivants in the United States in the nineteenth century, the English literature scholar Mary Chapman examined “how women [were] produced by this signifying practice” and “how the aesthetic and technical codes outlined in tableau vivant manuals contributed to nineteenth-century constructions of women as silent and immobile.”<sup>31</sup> At the same time, Chapman argues, some women resisted these constructions and turned the tableau into a tool for agency. In 1913, for instance, members of the National American Woman Suffrage Association presented “a series of tableaux representing Justice, Plenty, Columbia, Peace, Charity, and Liberty” in front of the Treasury Building in Washington, DC, to campaign for women’s vote.<sup>32</sup> In fiction too, writers such as Louisa May Alcott and Edith Wharton resisted the notion that women were simply constructed as still and silent through tableaux vivants.<sup>33</sup> In the same way, the women in *Tableau Representing Great Britain and Her Colonies*, I argue, are at once being constructed by the tableau they perform as well as constructing meaning and affirming their place in Dawson.

The tableau vivant also has a long history as a means for fundraising.<sup>34</sup> During the US Civil War, women organized tableaux vivants to come to the aid of Union soldiers.<sup>35</sup> In 1895 in Montreal, at the first grand ball that they hosted, the Governor General Lord Aberdeen and his wife presented a series of tableaux that celebrated the history of the French in Canada. The aim of the ball was also to raise funds to come to the aid of the less fortunate people living in Montreal.<sup>36</sup> As H. V. Nelles has shown, such “pageantry and spectacle” was a way of writing history in the process of nation building.<sup>37</sup> It also allowed the British to show magnanimity, not only in their concern for the poor, but also “in the continuing accommodation of the ‘French fact’.”<sup>38</sup>

The process of colonization, as the British journalist Flora Shaw recognized, could not be achieved without women. Shaw was the Colonial Editor for *The*

30. There exists a vast literature on this topic. See for instance Kathleen Nicholson, “The Ideology of Feminine ‘Virtue’: The Vestal Virgin in French Eighteenth-Century Allegorical Portraiture,” in *Portraiture: Facing the Subject*, edited by Joanna Woodall (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), 52–72; and Carmen J. Nielson, “Erotic Attachment, Identity Formation and the Body Politic: The Woman-as-nation in Canadian Graphic Satire, 1867–1914,” *Gender & History* 28, no. 1 (April 2016): 102–26.

31. Mary Chapman, “‘Living Pictures’: Women and Tableaux Vivants in Nineteenth-Century American Fiction and Culture,” *Wide Angle* 18, no. 3 (1996): 22–52, 26.

32. Chapman, “Living Pictures,” 26.

33. See Louisa May Alcott, *Behind a Mask* (1866) and *A Modern Mephistopheles* (1877), and Edith Wharton, *House of Mirth* (1905).

34. See Hannah Jordan, “Hidden Life: Reanimating Victorian Tableaux Vivants in the Rutland Gate Album,” in this issue of *RACAR*.

35. A fictionalized account of a tableau vivant organized in support of Union soldiers can be found in Anonymous, “Tableaux vivans [sic],” *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine* 162, no. 27 (October 1863): 698–704. Sally Anne Duncan refers to the “period re-enactments of colonial kitchens and relic rooms” by members of the United States Sanitary Commission, which was formed to provide support and relief to Union soldiers. Duncan, “Introduction,” *Visual Resources: An International Journal of Documentation*, Special issue “The Period Room,” 21, no. 3 (2005): 227–31, 228. For a history of the Sanitary Commission, see Charles Janeway Stillé, *History of the United States Sanitary Commission* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1866).

36. Arlis Barclay, “Sex and Influence: The Gendered Nature of Canadian Political Culture During the Aberdeen Years, 1893–1898,” PhD Dissertation, University of Toronto, 2015, 110.

37. H. V. Nelles, *The Art of Nation-Building: Pageantry and Spectacle at Quebec’s Tercentenary* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 11–12.

38. Barclay, “Sex and Influence,” 12.

*Times*, and had journeyed to the Klondike to report on the gold rush in 1898. She noted:

in the expansion of the Empire, as in other movements, man wins the battle but woman holds the field. To all who consulted me upon the subject I could only give my honest assurance that, so far as I know anything of women, it is not comfort but happiness which they desire. Englishwomen are not lacking in the courage of the race; and when it is generally realised [sic] that their happiness will be best secured by joining frankly with the men they trust in, the most vital movement of their country and their time, the development of Imperial expansion, will have entered upon another phase.<sup>39</sup>

But prospecting was primarily a masculine enterprise, and at the height of the gold rush, the 1898 census found that women accounted for eight percent of the population in the Klondike region, the percentage being slightly higher in Dawson, at twelve percent.<sup>40</sup> Some of them had travelled at the same time as their husbands or had jointed them later, but these were only a minority of the women in Dawson at the turn of the century. Most were single, and it was felt that the very uneven ratio of men to women (thirteen single men to every single woman<sup>41</sup>) encouraged dissolute behaviour that threatened Dawson's moral fabric. The editor of the *Klondike Miner and Yukon Advertiser* complained that "Dawson society is an odoriferous stench" because of its lack of what it perceived as virtuous women.<sup>42</sup>

Unmarried women travelling to the Yukon did so for a variety of reasons. A small minority of them went there as prospectors. Others recognized the job opportunities that life in the Klondike offered and relocated there, at least temporarily, to gain employment as cooks, cleaners, or teachers, and some opened up shops, saloons, and hotels. Many single women who travelled to the Klondike were involved in sex work, which was tolerated until the community became more established and the police began to feel pressure to crack down on it.<sup>43</sup> Women who worked in entertainment were often perceived as sexually available, partly because their bodies were on display. By the summer of 1898, Porsild estimates, "the dance halls, theatres, brothels, saloons, and gambling arenas provided employment for somewhere between 500 and 1,000 people."<sup>44</sup>

However important these women were in the development of Dawson, they are not the ones who form part of the *Tableau Representing Great Britain and Her Colonies*. Here, instead, we have the virtuous women that the editor of the *Klondike Miner and Yukon Advertiser* had sought: respectable women, in the presence of their children, protected by the military and police. The women make up a greater proportion in the tableau than they did in Dawson, although it is true that with the end of the gold rush, the percentage of women in Dawson began slowly to rise and reached close to 20% in 1901.<sup>45</sup> As Michael James Brand states in his work on transience in Dawson during the gold rush, "A high male to female ratio characterized the population during a mining camp's early years. An increase in the number of women in the community was heralded as a sign of settlement maturity."<sup>46</sup> By the beginning of 1900, when the *Tableau* was performed, the gold rush had been over for many months, so that those taking part (and watching) in the performance were, in large part at least, those who had decided to stay and settle Dawson.

39. Flora Shaw, "Klondike," paper read at the Special General Meeting, London, January 31, 1899, transcribed in J.S. O'Halloran, ed., *Proceedings of the Royal Colonial Institute* (London: The Royal Colonial Institute, 1899), 110–27, 113. The Royal Colonial Institute—initially named The Colonial Society—was founded in 1868 and was renamed The Royal Commonwealth Society in 1958. It still exists today.

40. Porsild, *Gamblers and Dreamers*, 20.

41. *Ibid.*, 64.

42. *Klondike Miner and Yukon Advertiser* editorial (December 30, 1898, 2), quoted in Bush, "The Dawson Daily News," 86.

43. The close links between colonization, the development of capitalism, and sex work have been examined by Anne M. Butler, *Daughters of Joy, Sisters of Misery: Prostitutes in the American West, 1865–1890* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1985), and Julie Ann Laite, "Historical Perspectives on Industrial Development, Mining, and Prostitution," *The Historical Journal* 52, no. 3 (2009): 739–61, among many others.

44. Porsild, *Gamblers and Dreamers*, 20.

45. *Ibid.*

46. Michael James Brand, "Transience in Dawson City, Yukon, During the Klondike Gold Rush," PhD Dissertation, Simon Fraser University, 2003, 268.

The image that is projected in the *Tableau* is therefore one of a healthy and stable community in terms of its settlement. Not only is there a closer woman to man ratio—eleven women and twenty men—but there are also six children, and they are placed at the base of the central pillar. From top to bottom, we discern three different age groups in a kind of assertion that a new generation is being born that will ensure the continuation of the settlement of the land. The children fulfill a dual function here: they help identify the women as mothers and not actresses, so that the women can showcase the ideal feminine values of virtue and respectability, and they embody the future of the community. This community is so stable, the photograph tells us, that it can afford to send men to a war 15,000 km away and come to the aid of those living in more precarious conditions, its widows and orphans. At the same time, it must be remembered that the people performing settledness in this tableau had only been in Dawson for a few months or years. The performance of *Tableau Representing Great Britain and Her Colonies* and the photo of this performance, taken together, expose the process of colonization as it was taking place, at once through the exclusion of Indigenous peoples who are held outside of it, and through the performance of settledness and stability by its figurants. ¶

**ACKNOWLEDGMENTS** I first presented parts of this paper at a conference on the history and practice of tableaux vivants in Canada held at the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal in February 2017. My sincere thanks to Mélanie Boucher, my co-editor of this issue, who organized the conference. I am also extremely grateful to Annie Gérin, Suzanne Paquet, and Hélène Samson for their help and advice, and to Peter Hodgins for so generously sharing his research with me.