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**DECADES BEFORE THE GROUP OF SEVEN, HOMER WATSON, THE NINETEENTH-CENTURY  
CANADIAN ARTIST LOVED BY QUEEN VICTORIA AND OSCAR WILDE,  
MADE GROUNDBREAKING LANDSCAPE PAINTINGS**

***New online art book Homer Watson: Life & Work looks at one of Canada's truly pioneering artists***

**TORONTO, ON** — Homer Watson (1855–1936) went from obscurity to international renown in 1880 when his painting, *The Pioneer Mill*, was purchased by Canada's then-governor general as a gift for Queen Victoria. The British monarch was an instant fan and went on to acquire a subsequent work. In 1882, Irish poet and playwright Oscar Wilde discovered Watson during a North American tour and dubbed him "the Canadian Constable," comparing him to John Constable, one of Britain's best-known painters of the nineteenth century. In two short years, Watson promoted his paintings that showcased a distinctly Canadian identity on the international stage. In the new art book *Homer Watson: Life & Work*, author Dr. Brian Foss recounts Watson's remarkable career.

Watson was born in Doon, Ontario, now a suburb of Kitchener. His landscapes paintings were deeply engaged with his beloved local geography. Although he made numerous stints abroad in Great Britain and the United States, Watson always eagerly returned back to Doon, where he found the most inspiration. The town became the subject of his career masterpiece *The Pioneer Mill* (1880), which famously hung in Queen Victoria's Windsor Castle home.

"Nearly forty years before the Group of Seven, in the 1880s, Watson made Canada his mission—a cause that the famous school would champion," says Sara Angel, Executive Director of the Art Canada Institute. "He was one of the first artists to portray local landscape painting as specifically Canadian, rather than as a pastiche of European influences." When the Group did emerge, Watson was not impressed by its stylistic modernism and its portrayal of the Canadian landscape as rugged and unpopulated.

Watson's landscape paintings are particularly relevant today because they raise difficult questions about the history of European settlement in Canada. The artist was a descendent of pioneers who in the early nineteenth century settled in southwestern Ontario—on Anishinaabe, Haudenosaunee, and Neutral (Attawandaron) land. Deeply connected to his roots, Watson often dealt with pioneer subjects in his landscapes, which serves as reminder of Canada's contentious colonial past. In *Homer Watson: Life & Work*, available online now, Foss reminds us of such complicated questions while recognizing this artist's contribution to Canadian art history.

"Watson believed in the importance of people maintaining sustainable relationships with nature, a perspective that owed much to his self-identification as a grandson of pioneers," says Foss, Director of Carleton University's School for Studies in Art and Culture. "His lifelong commitment to environmentalism and to the sanctity of nature echo strongly in twenty-first-century cultural attitudes."

***Homer Watson: Life & Work can be read, for free, on the Art Canada Institute's website and is available for PDF download.***

**FOR MEDIA INQUIRIES OR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT**

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## ABOUT THE ART CANADA INSTITUTE

The Art Canada Institute (ACI) is a non-profit research organization based at Massey College, University of Toronto. Its Canadian Online Art Book Project, a program that in the last three years has released over twenty-five books—available in both French and English, free of charge—publishes on key topics in Canadian art history. Launched in 2013, ACI is the only national institution whose mandate is to promote the study of an inclusive, multi-vocal Canadian art history to as broad an audience as possible, in both English and French, within Canada and internationally.

## IMAGES

Please contact Emily Lawrence at [elawrence@aci-iac.ca](mailto:elawrence@aci-iac.ca) for hi-res image files.



## IMAGE CREDITS

1. Homer Watson, *The Pioneer Mill*, 1890, etching on paper, 33.4 x 44.5 cm, plate: 30.2 x 44.5 cm, private collection.
2. Homer Watson, *Before the Storm*, 1887, oil on canvas, 61.4 x 91.5 cm, Art Gallery of Windsor.
3. Homer Watson, *Quilp and Sampson Brass in the Old Curiosity Shop*, late 1860s to early 1870s, pen and black ink, dry brush, and graphite on wove paper, 27.3 x 20.3 cm, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.
4. Homer Watson, *The Stone Road*, 1881, oil on canvas, 91.5 x 129.8 cm, National Gallery of Canada.
5. Homer Watson, *Haymaking, Last Load*, c.1880, oil on canvas, 53.2 x 80.1 cm, Art Gallery of Hamilton.
6. Homer Watson, *Near the Close of a Stormy Day*, 1884, oil on canvas, 96.5 x 142.6 cm, Winnipeg Art Gallery.