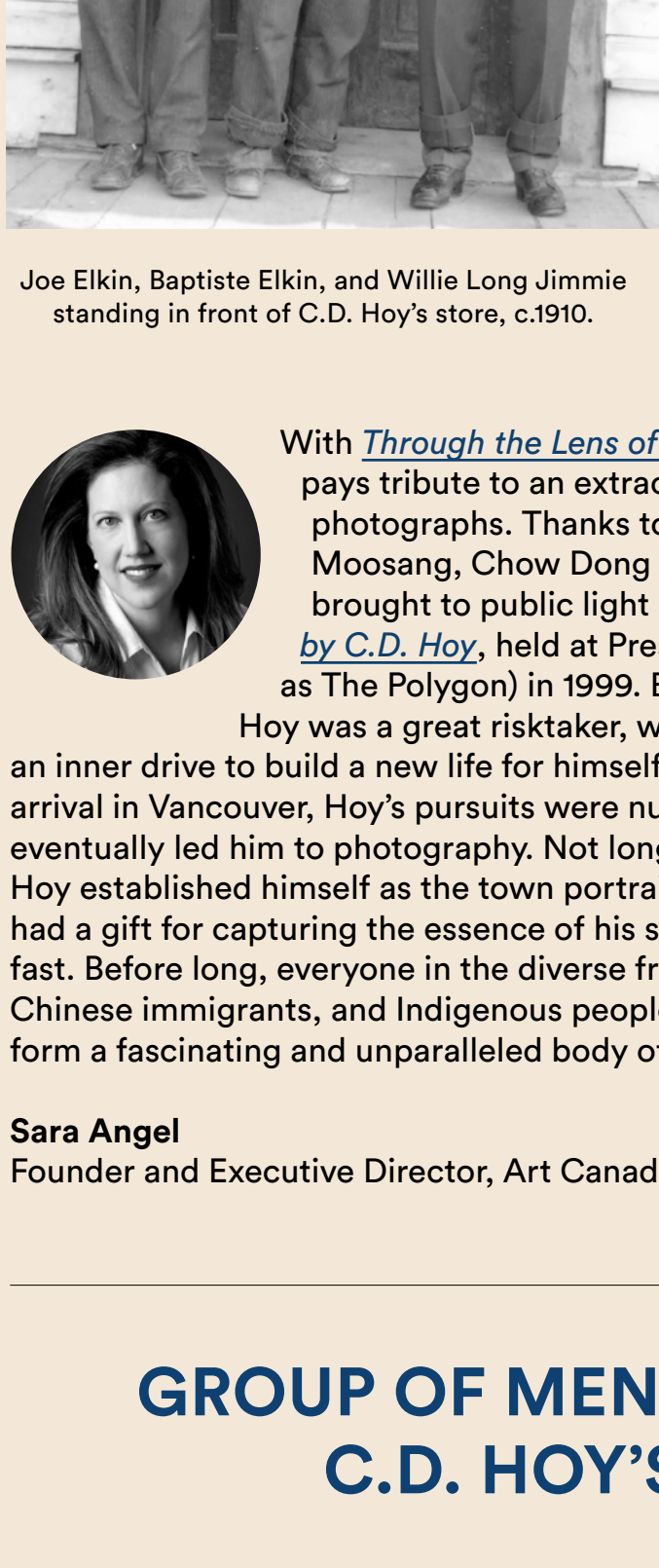


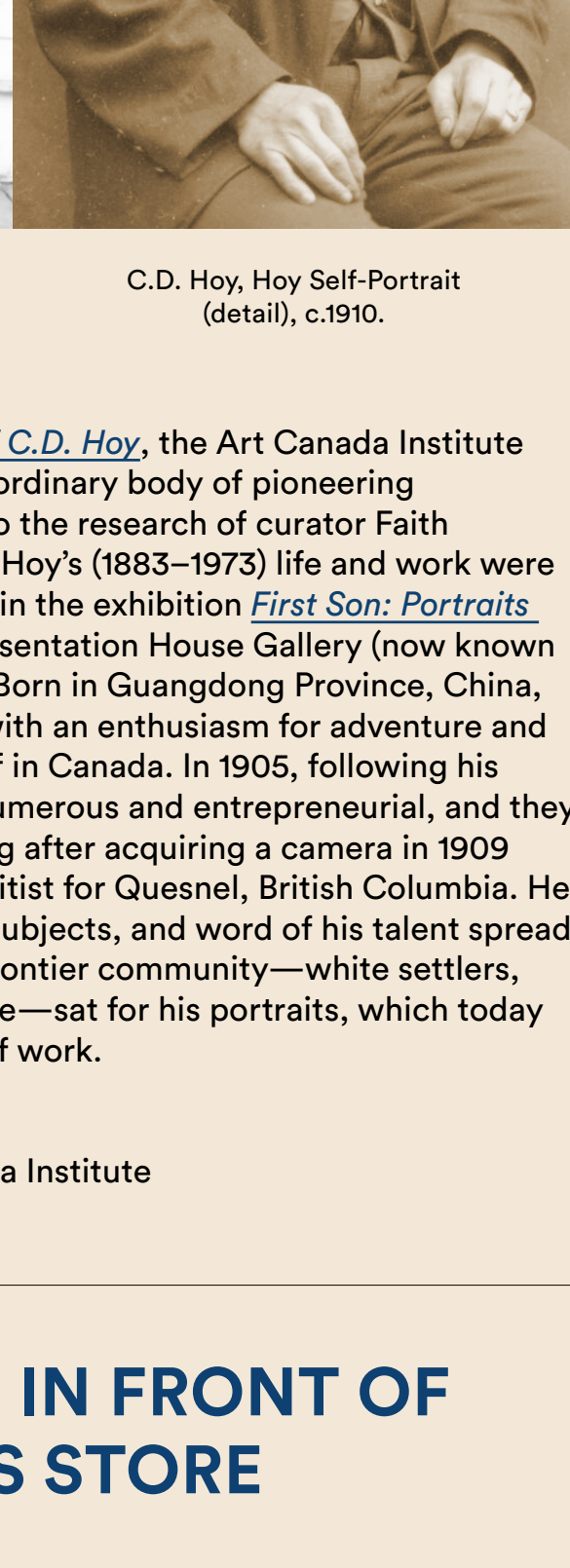
MAY 28, 2021

FRONTIER CAMERA MAN THE REMARKABLE STORY OF CHINESE CANADIAN C.D. HOY

As we celebrate Asian Heritage Month, today the Art Canada Institute presents an online exhibition on a groundbreaking photographer whose work documents a multicultural community at the turn of the century.



Joe Elkin, Baptiste Elkin, and Willie Long Jimmie standing in front of C.D. Hoy's store, c.1910.



C.D. Hoy, Hoy Self-Portrait (detail), c.1910.



With *Through the Lens of C.D. Hoy*, the Art Canada Institute pays tribute to an extraordinary body of pioneering photographs. Thanks to the research of curator Faith Moosang, Chow Dong Hoy's (1883–1973) life and work were brought to public light in the exhibition *First Son: Portraits by C.D. Hoy*, held at Presentation House Gallery (now known as The Polygon) in 1999. Born in Guangdong Province, China, Hoy was a great risktaker, with an enthusiasm for adventure and an inner drive to build a new life for himself in Canada. In 1905, following his arrival in Vancouver, Hoy's pursuits were numerous and entrepreneurial, and they eventually led him to photography. Not long after acquiring a camera in 1909 Hoy established himself as the town portraitist for Quesnel, British Columbia. He had a gift for capturing the essence of his subjects, and word of his talent spread fast. Before long, everyone in the diverse frontier community—white settlers, Chinese immigrants, and Indigenous people—sat for his portraits, which today form a fascinating and unparalleled body of work.

Sara Angel
Founder and Executive Director, Art Canada Institute

GROUP OF MEN IN FRONT OF C.D. HOY'S STORE

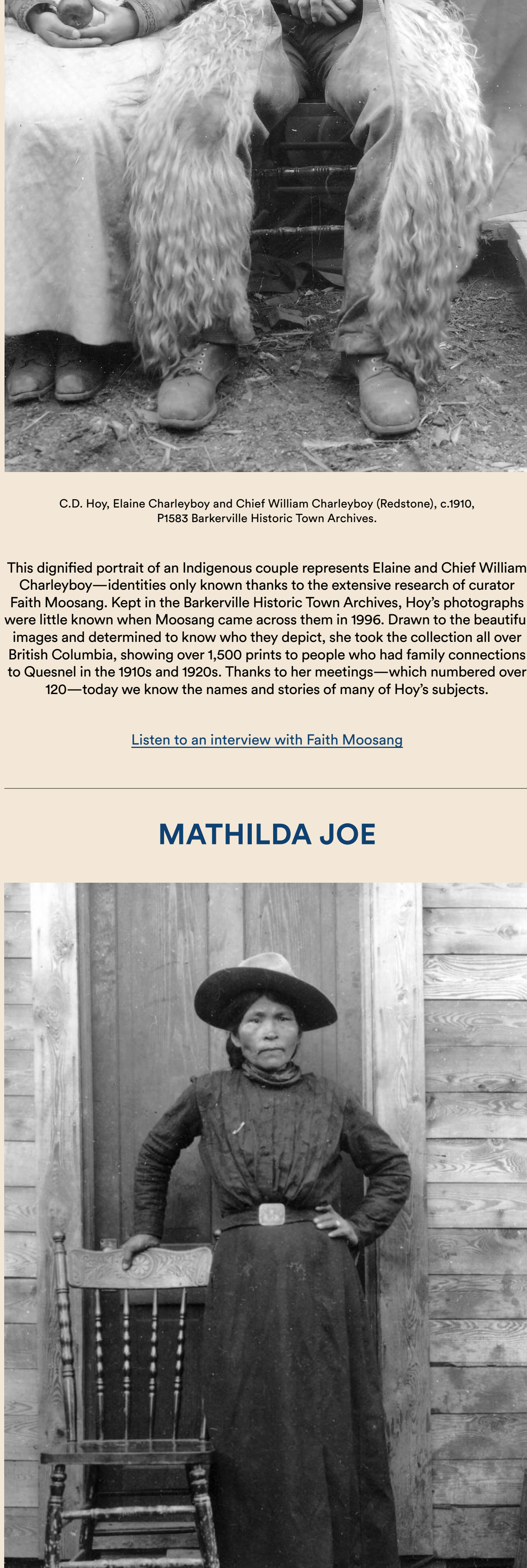


C.D. Hoy, Group of men in front of C.D. Hoy's store in Quesnel, left to right: Jerry Boyd (Kluskus), Captain Marc Mack (Nazko), John Lazzarin (blacksmith), Chief Michel (Nazko), unknown Chinese man, Moffat Harris (Nazko), and Chief Morris Mollze (Kluskus), c.1910. P1887 Barkerville Historic Town Archives.

With a history grounded in the nineteenth-century gold rush, Quesnel was a town of miners, ranchers, farmers, and traders, settled by both Europeans and Chinese people and closely connected to Dakehn and Tsilhqot'in reserves and communities nearby. This informal group shot is one of many of Hoy's images that reveal the cross-cultural connections in the town. His oeuvre can be divided almost exactly in thirds in relation to the representation of Indigenous, Chinese, and Caucasian people, indicating not only the then incredible diversity of frontier regions like the Cariboo, but also that each of these cultural groups felt equally comfortable beneath the levelling gaze of this Chinese man and his camera.

[Visit the Online Exhibition](#)

ELAINE AND CHIEF WILLIAM CHARLEYBOY (REDSTONE)



C.D. Hoy, Elaine Charleyboy and Chief William Charleyboy (Redstone), c.1910. P1583 Barkerville Historic Town Archives.

This dignified portrait of an Indigenous couple represents Elaine and Chief William Charleyboy—identities only known thanks to the extensive research of curator Faith Moosang. Kept in the Barkerville Historic Town Archives, Hoy's photographs were little known when Moosang came across them in 1996. Drawn to the beautiful images and determined to know who they depict, she took the collection all over British Columbia, showing over 1,500 prints to people who had family connections to Quesnel in the 1910s and 1920s. Thanks to her meetings—which numbered over 120—today we know the names and stories of many of Hoy's subjects.

[Listen to an interview with Faith Moosang](#)

MATHILDA JOE



C.D. Hoy, Mathilda Joe, c.1910. P1631 Barkerville Historic Town Archives.

Working in a busy frontier community and also running his own general store, Hoy became known for taking pictures anywhere he could, setting up makeshift studios and selecting outdoor backdrops—he used storefronts, homes, and fields. In this striking portrait of Mathilda Joe, he has taken a door frame and the building's siding to create a delicate textured background, highlighting her powerful presence. The wife of the Hereditary Chief of ʔesdílágh, she was known as an excellent hunter who provided meat for the entire community.

Here her gesture of holding the chair might be seen as an invitation, welcoming us to sit and speak with her.

[Read an essay by Faith Moosang](#)

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KONG SHING SING ON A HORSE

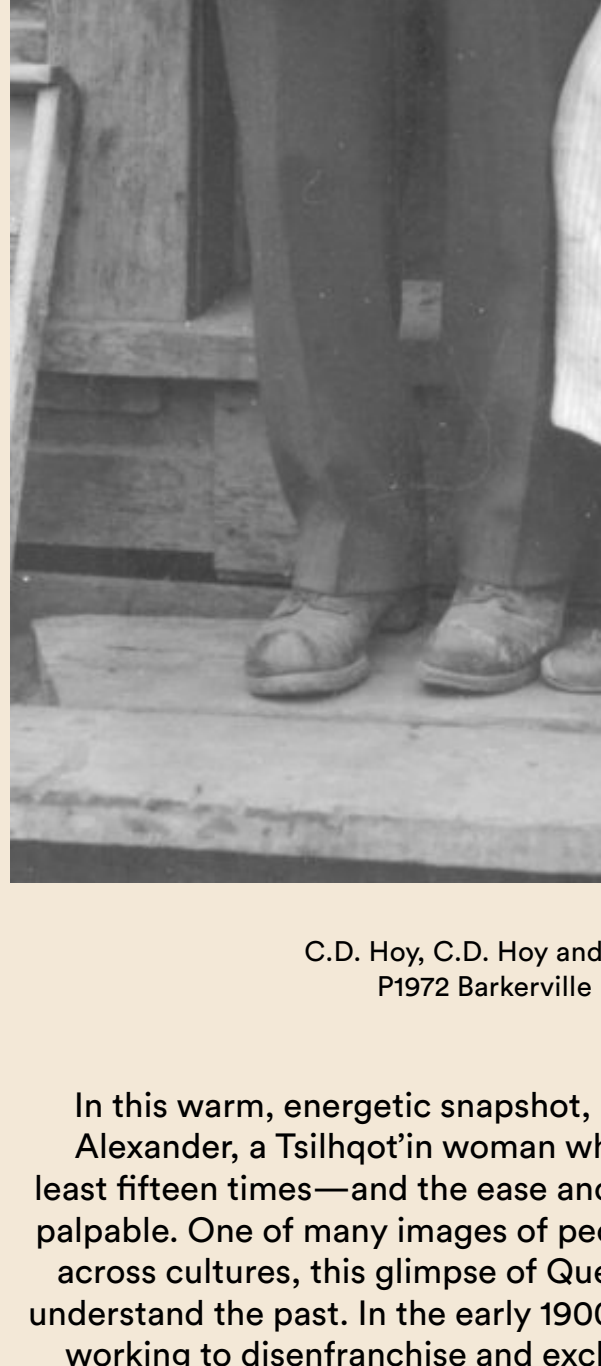


C.D. Hoy, Kong Shing Sing on a horse on Barlow Avenue in Quesnel, c.1910. P1929 Barkerville Historic Town Archives.

In this dramatic portrait, Hoy depicts Kong Shing Sing, a son of the pioneer Nam Sing family in Quesnel, on horseback. An expert blacksmith, teamster, and cowboy, Kong was the son of Chinese rancher Chew Nam Sing, one of the very first Asian men drawn to the Cariboo by the lure of gold. At the time, Canadian immigration policies discriminated against Chinese people, who faced intense systemic racism on arrival. Hoy's work must be seen in this context, yet his subjects suggest extraordinary resilience. As Chinese Canadian writer Paul Yee has commented, they "radiate individual dignity" that "reflects personal survival strategies...the Chinese were not driven back to China."

[Visit the Online Exhibition](#)

LAURA (YEE) SING and MRS. WON GAR WONG



C.D. Hoy, Laura (Yee) Sing, c.1915. P2062 Barkerville Historic Town Archives.

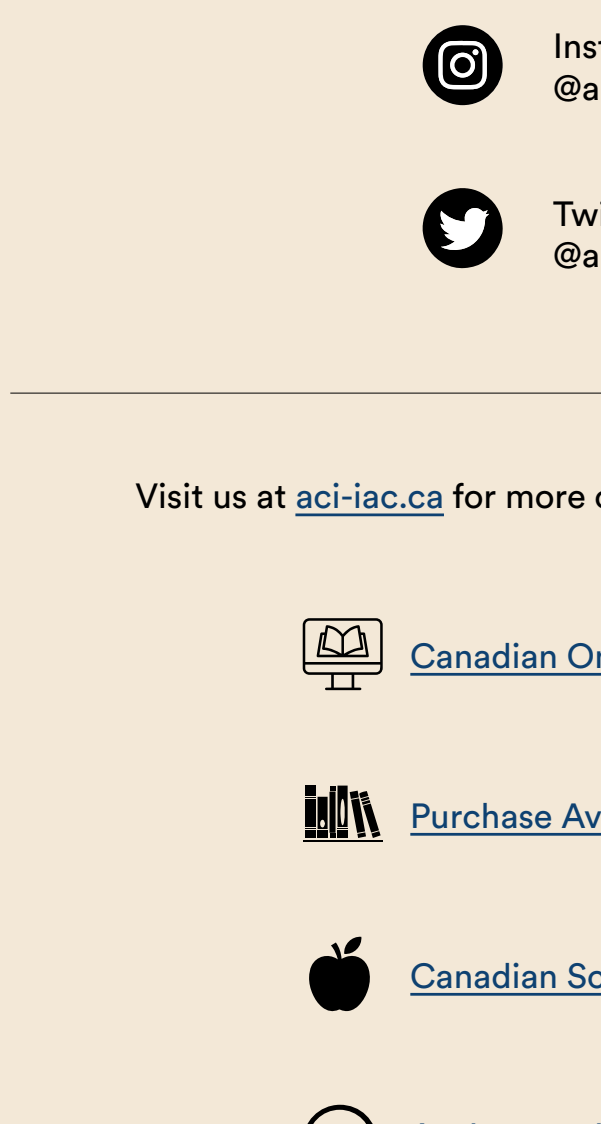


C.D. Hoy, Mrs. Won Gar Wong, 1912. P1978 Barkerville Historic Town Archives.

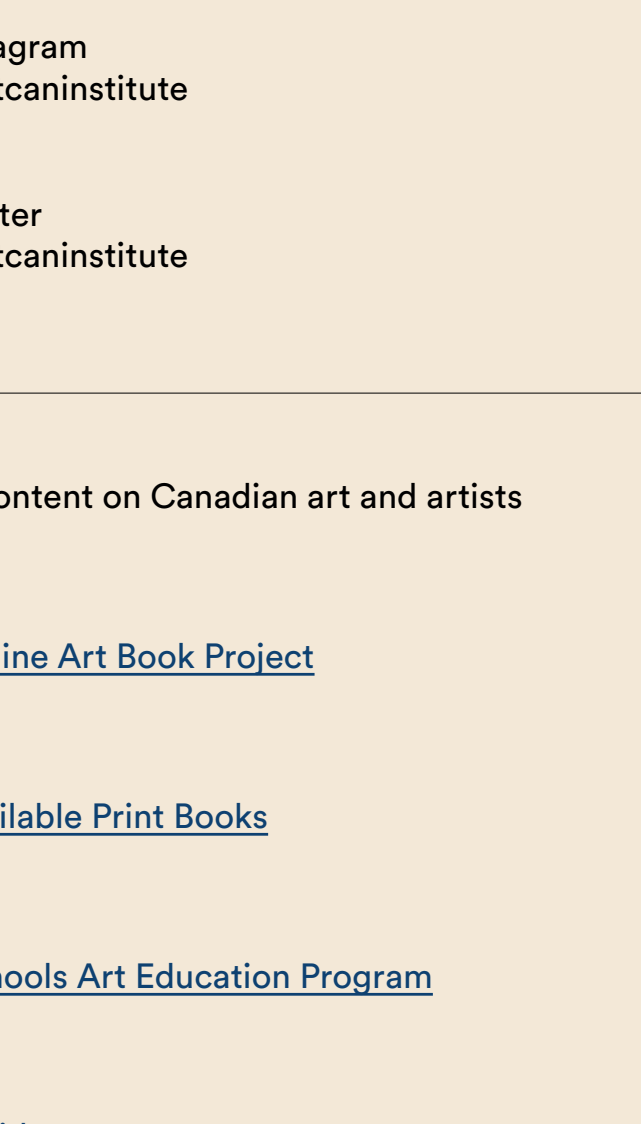
Hoy's works reveal a range of different approaches to dress and self-presentation in the community, as can be seen in these two portraits. Laura (Yee) Sing (left) was one of two daughters born to the Nam Sing family (and the sister of Kong Shing Sing). Shown here in Western dress, her confident pose and frank gaze into the camera suggest a certain comfort with both herself and her surroundings—not something to discount in view of the history of legislation against the very presence of Chinese people in Canada. Other individuals took pride in wearing traditional clothing for their portraits, as can be seen in the image on the right, which beautifully depicts the second wife of Won Gar Wong, miner and owner of the Kwong Lung Kee store in Stanley.

[Read an essay by Faith Moosang](#)

LIM POI and A CHINESE MAN IN HOY'S STUDIO



C.D. Hoy, Lim Poi (likely), a pig farmer near Prince George and business owner in Quesnel and Barkerville, c.1910. P2023 Barkerville Historic Town Archives.



C.D. Hoy, Chinese man in Revolutionary background (detail), 1912. P1687 Barkerville Historic Town Archives.

Though Hoy was self-taught, his work reveals the influence of Chinese art through the adaptation of motifs for his pictures. His photograph of Lim Poi (left), for instance, shows the well-known farmer and business owner frontally with widely triangulated legs gripped by broadly played fingers, a practice that mirror conventions of Chinese ancestor portraiture and early Hong Kong studio photography. Similarly, Hoy's go-to cloth backdrop was festooned with chrysanthemums, a late-blooming flower that represented the overcoming of adversity in Chinese culture. In the image on the right, Hoy has hung Chinese political banners as well, propaganda that would likely have been familiar to the man depicted.

[Visit the Online Exhibition](#)

C.D. HOY AND JOSEPHINE ALEXANDER



C.D. Hoy, C.D. Hoy and Josephine Alexander, c.1915. P1972 Barkerville Historic Town Archives.

In this warm, energetic snapshot, Hoy appears with the young Josephine Alexander, a Tsilhqot'in woman who worked for him and posed for him at least fifteen times—and the ease and joy they take in each other's existence is palpable. One of many images of people who created families and friendships across cultures, this glimpse of Quesnel challenges us to reflect on how we understand the past. In the early 1900s, the Canadian government was actively working to disenfranchise and exclude non-Caucasian immigrants and the Indigenous people of this land, yet in his own town, Hoy was creating a record that in many ways pushed back against these racist constructs.

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Image Credits: [1] From left to right: Joe Elkin, Baptiste Elkin, and Willie Long Jimmie standing in front of C.D. Hoy's store in Quesnel with their outer pair of pants rolled up to reveal another pair underneath, c.1910. P2025 Barkerville Historic Town Archives. [2] C.D. Hoy, Hoy Self-Portrait (modified from the original), c.1910. P1655 Barkerville Historic Town Archives. [3] C.D. Hoy, Group of men in front of C.D. Hoy's store in Quesnel, left to right: Jerry Boyd (Kluskus), Captain Marc Mack (Nazko), John Lazzarin (blacksmith), Chief Michel (Nazko), unknown Chinese man, Moffat Harris (Nazko), and Chief Morris Mollze (Kluskus), c.1910. P1887 Barkerville Historic Town Archives. [4] C.D. Hoy, Elaine Charleyboy and Chief William Charleyboy (Redstone), c.1910. P1583 Barkerville Historic Town Archives. [5] C.D. Hoy, Mathilda Joe, c.1910. P1631 Barkerville Historic Town Archives. [6] C.D. Hoy, Kong Shing Sing on a horse on Barlow Avenue in Quesnel, c.1910. P1929 Barkerville Historic Town Archives. [7] C.D. Hoy, Laura (Yee) Sing, c.1915. P2062 Barkerville Historic Town Archives. [8] C.D. Hoy, Mrs. Won Gar Wong, 1912. P1978 Barkerville Historic Town Archives. [9] C.D. Hoy, Lim Poi (likely), a pig farmer near Prince George and business owner in Quesnel and Barkerville, c.1910. P2023 Barkerville Historic Town Archives. [10] C.D. Hoy, Chinese man in Revolutionary background, 1912. P1687 Barkerville Historic Town Archives. [11] C.D. Hoy, C.D. Hoy and Josephine Alexander, c.1915. P1972 Barkerville Historic Town Archives.