When it comes to history, photography is just as important an aspect as the words written about the event themselves. What is written about a person or event is basically an interpretation. The same goes for handmade visual elements like paintings and drawings. Photographed images are not so much statements about the world but rather pieces of it. Think of them as miniatures of reality that really anyone can make or acquire [[1]](#footnote-1). Photography enables the exchange of objective information through the visual capture of things as they really are. People have an emotional response to images. What people can see is often more likely to influence their opinion than what they simply read or hear 2. Photographs that accompany a news story, for instance, add a certain level of validation to words that could possibly be false. Photographs also serve as visual aids for education, assembly and other purposes. Readers are better able to understand a subject when they can look at helpful pictures for reference 3. Photography is more accurate than previous forms of visual media. The reliability of a painting or drawing, for example, depends on the artistic skills and abilities of the artist. Furthermore, an artist can add, neglect and exaggerate as he pleases. On the other hand, a camera is an instrument that produces standard results. It captures a scene the same way no matter who uses it 4.

There are things one should consider when viewing historical photographs or when taking photographs for historical value: Does the photograph truly represent its subject? How is this photograph a symbol of larger issues, feelings, or events? Why is this moment significant 5. Photography came about in 1826, and ever since then the invention has done an exceptional job at recording the events past and what is happening around the world. We owe just as much credit to the invention of photography as we do to the individuals who took this instrument and started capturing still frames as a hobby, and we have those who contributed their images to the public to allow us the pleasure of viewing an image we may not see otherwise, to thank 6.[[2]](#footnote-2)

Thanks to a handful of talented photographers from the past we are able to view Canada’s great history in greater depth than if we were to just read about it in text. Photographers such as Fredrick Dally, and William Notman took notice to the activity flowing through the country of Canada. Realizing the importance of these events the two photographers have done us the pleasure of documenting some of Canada’s momentous times so we may have a better understanding of such events.

An photographer by the name of Fredrick Dally (July 1838 – July 1914)7 an [English/Canadian](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/English_Canadian) portrait and landscape photographer best known for his images of the [Caribou goldfields](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cariboo_Gold_Rush) in [British Columbia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_Columbia), helped to capture some of B.C’s great historical moments 8. While documenting the Caribou gold rush, from 1867 to 1870, Dally captured dozens of pictures of the miners trekking through central B.C. for their chance at striking gold. He not only captured the excitement and frustration of these miners in his photographs, was also successful at capturing images of the woman and children of this time during the gold rush. As well, he recognized the Indigenous peoples of the land and documented their attitudes and views on the Caribou gold rush in his photographs.

[[3]](#footnote-3)Dally’s photograph of “Zadoskis' Grave” or “Indian Grave on Cariboo Road” depicts all of these aspects in one photo 9. When viewing photographs one should keep in mind the historical context but also treat it as thought it were a piece of art. The photograph was taken between 1867 and 1870 by Dally 10. It is shown in a “black and white” nature and is a silver albumen print 11. A silver albumen print used the [albumen](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Albumen) found in [egg whites](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Egg_white) to bind the photographic chemicals to the paper and became the dominant form of photographic positives from 1855 to the turn of the 20th century 12. When documented, Dally had this to say about his photograph; “#57 Zadoskis grave by the side of the Fraser River is one of the handsomest of the Indian Mauloleums in that country - he is represented carved in wood with the base stuck upright in the ground, having a piece of folded printed calico bound as a band round his head and his legs encased in or ornamented with another piece of printed calico of a lighter colour, various deceased members of his family are represented in carved figures near to his own effigy, his family totem or crest which was a bear is also artistically carved about the grave of which the family was very proud. There was also suspended from one of the poles his gun but having [[4]](#footnote-4)the lock previously removed to prevent robbery; and also for his convenience and comfort on his arrival in the happy hunting grounds are also several brass and copper kettles disposed about the front part of the grave, but with holes purposely knocked in them so as to render them unfit for any worldly thief..." (from Dally Notes in Archives)”13.

The photograph features carved, wooden figures in an Indian (Indigenous) gravesite near the Fraiser River, B.C. The carved wooden figures represent an Indian chief by the name of Zadoskis. Along with him in the gravesite are members of his family. The figures stand broad and tall, symbolizing strength and unity 14. On the right side of the photograph the main figure (Zadoskis) stands by himself away from the collection of the other carved figures to the left side of the image. Why is this so? The other carved figures clearly are representations of loved members of the family; Zadoskis should be joined with the rest of his family. Although, Zadoskis figure standing solo could all be for good reason. Having Zadoskis figure removed from the rest of his families’ totems may represent Zadoskis standing watch and protecting his family and their resting grounds 15. The photograph shows spectacular detail from the shingles on the roof behind the figures, to the pots hanging on the sides of the house structure, to the spots on the cloth that dresses Zadoskis figure 16.

Dally did well to capture the essence of these sacred grounds. The caribou gold rush played a major roll in developing B.C. into the province it is today.

[[5]](#footnote-5)Also noteworthy at this time was William Notman (March 1826 – November 1891). Notman spent his youth working for the family firm (dry-goods) and perusing photography only as a talented armature 17. It was not until business problems and a threatening lawsuit led him to immigrate to Montreal, Canada, and that he applied his considerable energies to photography full-time. In 1856, Notman opened a small portrait studio in his home on Bluery Street 18. When William Notman came to Canada in the summer of 1856, he had three considerable advantages: First, as a partner in his fathers wholesale dry-goods firm in Glasgow, he had a sound training in business indiscretion. Second, he had a compelling desire to succeed, fuelled no doubt in part by a whish to erase the stain of his family’s business indiscretion. And thirdly; he was an excellent, although armature photographer. He soon put all three attributes to work in establishing himself in the rising city of Montreal 19. Notman had always been interested in art and as a youth had trained in painting and drawing in Scotland. As assessment of the relatively few photographers then practicing in Montreal might well have convinced young Notman that there was a considerable opportunity for a man of his talents 20.

[[6]](#footnote-6)Contemporary accounts suggest the immediate success of Notman’s portrait business on Bluery Street. Within a relatively short time, he had photographed many of the loyalists that composed Montreal’s elite 21. His work is of a very fine quality, his posing of the subject is proper, and his use of light is subtle. Notman’s prices, although somewhat higher than average were wisely kept in a range that permitted ordinary people of modest means to sit in front of his camera as well 22. In the end neither art nor science, but rather engineering secured Notman’s future. The coming of the railroad transformed North American cities; similarly it would change dramatically the life and prospects of his life as well as countless others 23. In 1858 the Grand Trunk Railway commissioned Notman to photograph and document the much-celebrated Victoria Bridge, the long awaited link between the North and South shores of the St. Lawrence River at Montreal 24 25. Aside from the glory of the enormous undertaking itself, this huge bridge would mean and all-season rail rout, from the very heart of Montreal deep into New England and particularly to the Atlantic seaports of Portland and Boston 26. The bridge also meant a more modern means of access to the rich agricultural lands of Canada-West and to the untapped promise of the western parries under the domain of the powerful Hudson’s Bay [[7]](#footnote-7)Company 27.

From this point on Notman’s business expanded dramatically. He began to hire more photographers and assistants, as well as taking on extensive clerical and support staff 28. Notman’s attractive personal style was thought throughout his portrait studio’s staff and remained a quality the members of the staff would hold long after they were no longer under his instruction 29. The aspect of Notman’s vision that makes his work so distinctive is a tendency towards abstraction and simplicity in design. By choice of camera position, together with adjusting the intensity of light, he rendered his subjects, whether they were individuals, landscapes, or engineering structures as monumental and heroic 30. Early in his career, William Notman began to document the cities, the villages and the landscapes of Canada-East as well as the streets of Montreal and the important buildings of the city. By 1859 Notman began to travel and to send staff photographers to more distant parts of Canada. Often to areas where geographical features had a wide appeal. Niagara Falls, and the swirling Niagara River, and the Chaudière Falls at Ottawa were all captured on glass plates and documented through means of photography 30.

Among Notman’s frequently displayed images were often the large composite photographs which gained Notman international praise for their meticulous and innovative use of the ‘paste up technique’. By this I mean: Notman would make negatives and cut the figures from each negative and paste them to a new negative to create a new still frames 31. Some of the truly immense composites of snowshoe clubs (a [[8]](#footnote-8)popular pastime in areas of Canada at this time 32 contain over 300 figures dressed in black coats and woolen toques who seemingly grace the snow covered slopes of [[9]](#footnote-9)Montreal’s Mount Royal or other woodland setting. In reality, each person had been photographed individually in the warmth of Notman’s studio. When prints were made from each negative, the figures were carefully cut out by members of Notman’s art department and then pasted, one by one, on a large printed background 33. It was a process in the world of photography that would carry on for years to come 34.

What caused Notman to expand his business horizons beyond Montreal and establish branches of his firm in other Canadian cities? The answer is not quite clear, but it should be remembered that Notman, because of his British business apprenticeship, was no stranger to travel and well understood the need for seeking and securing new opportunities and markets 35. Neither would the simple advantages or economies of scale be unknown to him. Besides, in the backdrop were two significant political events that may well have provided motivation for wanting to expand the business: First was the successful development of 1867, of Canadian political independence from Britain with the confederation, an event promising growth through a wider national market, with stronger opportunities and a reappearance of immigration 36. And second, no less significant was the success promised by the newly altered Northern United States, rich and powerful in the wake of civil war, and poised to take advantage of the abundant opportunities of industrialization, a huge market place and the exploitation of the country West of the Mississippi. All of this growth assured both North and South of the boarder the continued emergence of confident, powerful, and aspiring different classed groups in reflecting upon their new found identity 37 38.

William Notman had triumphantly turned his picture-taking hobby into a profitable profession. Additionally, his fame as a photographic artist gave him immense personal satisfaction, which noticeably was reflected in his work. Along the way he produced wonderfully detailed, excellent quality photographs of historical moments in Canada’s past that have helped give us a better understanding of this grand country.

Canada has had a truly remarkable history and one should consider themselves lucky that there are photographs to accompany the text of this country’s grand history.

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