

## A Chronology of Tom Thomson's Life

By Joan Murray

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### 1877

**August 5:** Thomas John Thomson is born in Claremont, Ontario, in a home on R.R. # 5, the sixth of ten children of John Thomson (1840-1930) and Margaret J. Matheson (sometimes spelled Mathison or Mathewson) (1842-1925). The eldest child of the family, George, was born in 1868; then came Elizabeth in 1869, Henry in 1871, Louise in 1873, Minnie in 1875, Ralph in 1880, James Brodie in 1882, Margaret in 1884 and Fraser in 1886.

**October 23:** John Thomson pays \$6,600.00 for one hundred acres with a house and barn, lot number thirty-six, concession A, at Leith in the Township of Sydenham, Ontario, 11 kilometres from Owen Sound. The family moves in.

### 1898

Receives an inheritance of about \$2,000 from his grandfather, Thomas ("Tam") Thomson (1806-1875).

### 1899

Works at William Kennedy & Sons Ltd., a foundry, machine shop and pattern shop in Owen Sound, as a machinist apprentice, but quits after eight months, in August.

### 1900

**September:** Moves to Chatham, Ontario, to attend the Canada Business College. He boards with a family named Baxter, likely that of William Baxter, a printer with a "Book and Job" shop on King Street, whose residence is on Delaware Avenue (*Vernon's City of Chatham Directory*, 1900-1902). He stays eight months.

### 1901

**Spring:** Returns to Owen Sound.

**Late summer:** Stops in Winnipeg en route to Seattle, Washington, where his brother George and cousin F.R. McLaren, both graduates of Canada Business College in Chatham (McLaren was also an instructor), started the Consolidated College Company in 1894-95, a school they had formed by consolidating their own school, the

Acme Business College, with the Seattle & Puget Sound Business College (advertisement in *Seattle City Directory*). By 1903, the main operation of the Consolidated College Company is the Acme Business College (*Seattle City Directory*).

Works at the Diller Hotel, Seattle, as a lift boy, rooming with Mabel and P. Pitt Shaw, 703 Twenty-First Street.

## 1901-02

Brother Ralph arrives in Seattle.

## 1902

In January, brother Henry arrives in Seattle.

Attends the Acme Business College, S.E. Corner Second Avenue and Pike for six months.

**Late autumn:** Joins Maring and Ladd as a pen artist and engraver. C.C. Maring, the head of the firm, had also been an instructor at the Canada Business College in Chatham.

John and Margaret Thomson sell the farm at Leith. They live for a short time with their daughter Elizabeth and son-in-law Thomas J. Harkness on a farm below Annan, then they buy a property near Sydenham school on Eighth Street in Owen Sound (exact date of purchase unknown).

## 1903

Thomson, still with Maring and Blake (the firm's name changes this year), continues to room with the Shaws, who move this year to 2014 East Cherry, around the corner from their old house.

First published work appears in an advertisement for the Acme Business College, which appears on Christmas Day 1903 in the *Seattle Republican*. Although inspired by an advertisement for the Canada Business College in a pamphlet from Chatham, "Canada's Greatest School of Business" (1903), Thomson simplifies the design, giving it more impact. He signs it "Thomson."

Thomson moves to the Seattle Engraving Company, 115 Third Avenue South. He is still boarding at 2014 East Cherry.

## 1904-05

Thomson returns to Owen Sound.

**1905**

**March:** George Thomson and Frank McLaren sell the Acme Business College.

**June:** Thomson joins the art department of Legg Brothers, a photo-engraving firm in Toronto, Ontario, as senior artist.

**1906**

Resident at 34 Elm Street (*Toronto City Directory*).

Is said to have enrolled in night classes at the Central Ontario School of Art and Design, 165 King Street West, Toronto, probably studying drawing from the antique (plaster casts) and from life; is said to have continued his studies with William Cruikshank. The school was renamed several times, most notably the Ontario College of Art (OCA) in 1912 and the Ontario College of Art and Design University (OCADU) in 2010.

Visits Owen Sound on weekends.

**1907**

Resident at 54 Elm Street, home of Joseph R. Walton, Harness Maker (*Toronto City Directory*).

**1908**

Resident at 54 Elm Street (*Toronto City Directory*).

**August 18:** John and Margaret Thomson pay \$525 for the land for a house they build at 528 Fourth Avenue East, Owen Sound.

**1909**

Resident at 99 Gerrard Street East, home of Mrs. Esther Plewes (Plewis) (*Toronto City Directory*).

**January (or December 1908):** Hired at Grip Limited, Engravers, 48 Temperance Street, Toronto, where he works for J.E.H. MacDonald, senior artist with the firm, and Albert H. Robson, art director.

**1910**

Resident at 99 Gerrard Street East (*Toronto City Directory*).

## 1911

Resident at 99 Gerrard Street East (*Toronto City Directory*).

**February:** Arthur Lismer joins the Grip firm, followed by Franklin Carmichael in April.

Thomson paints at Lake Scugog with H.B. (Ben) Jackson, a Grip employee.

**November:** Meets Lawren Harris at an exhibition of J.E.H. MacDonald's sketches at the Arts and Letters Club, Toronto.

## 1912

Resident at 54 Alexander Street, home of Noah Luke (*Toronto City Directory*); later boards with William S. Broadhead, another Grip employee, at 119 Summerhill Avenue, and writes Dr. M.J. McRuer from that address; also boards with Benjamin Catchpole at the home of Mrs. McKenzie, Breadalbane Street (deposition on the painting *On the Sydenham River*, November 19, 1973).

**May:** Travels to Canoe Lake Station, Algonquin Park, with Ben Jackson; camps at Tea Lake Dam and Canoe Lake; meets the ranger Harry (Bud) Callighen.

**Late July-23 September:** Travels in the area of the Mississagi Forest Reserve, west of Sudbury, with William Broadhead. There they meet Archie Belaney, later known as Grey Owl, who is working as a ranger. Starting at Biscotasing, they paddle in a Peterborough canoe down Bisco Lake to Ramsey Lake, up the Spanish River, through Spanish Lake and portage into Canoe Lake, portage to Osagama Lake, then to Green Lake, then to the Mississagi Forest Reserve and reach the Aubinadong River, a branch of the Mississagi. They spend some time at Aubrey Falls, then make their way along the Mississagi River through the forty-mile (64 km) rapids to Squaw Chute.

**August:** F.H. Varley joins the Grip firm.

**October:** With other Grip artists, Thomson follows their art director, Albert Robson, to Rous and Mann Press Limited, 72 York Street.

Meets Dr. J.M. MacCallum, an ophthalmologist, at J.E.H. MacDonald's studio.

## 1913

Resident on Isabella Street; later moves to 66 Wellesley Street East.

**April 5-26:** Ontario Society of Artists Forty-first Annual Exhibition, Toronto. Thomson exhibits *Northern Lake*. It is purchased by the Ontario Government for \$250. In the catalogue, his address is given as 66 Wellesley Street.

Decides to paint full-time; gets two-month leave of absence from Rous and Mann for a sketching trip north.

**Spring and summer:** Possibly works as a fire ranger on the Metagami Reserve, just south of Timmins, Ontario (the name Thomas Thomson appears in the 1913 pay list).

**August (?):** Goes to Algonquin Park, where he canoes from Canoe Lake to Manitou and North Tea Lakes in the northern part of the park and meets Tom Wattie, a ranger stationed on North Tea Lake, before returning to Canoe Lake.

**November:** Returns to Toronto via Huntsville. Dr. MacCallum introduces him to A.Y. Jackson, who is sharing Lawren Harris's studio.

## 1914

**January:** Shares studio number one with Jackson in the new Studio Building on Severn Street.

**February 7-28:** Second Annual Exhibition of *Little Pictures by Canadian Artists*, Art Galleries of the Public Reference Library, Toronto. Thomson exhibits five sketches ranging in price from \$20 to \$25: *Cumulus Clouds*, *Evening*, *Grey Day*, *Northern Lake*, *Winter*.

**March 14-April 11:** Ontario Society of Artists Forty-second Annual Exhibition, Toronto. Thomson exhibits *Morning Cloud* and *Moonlight*. *Moonlight* is bought by the National Gallery of Canada for \$150. Thomson's address is given in the catalogue as Studio Building, Severn Street.

**March:** Elected a member of the Ontario Society of Artists.

**Late April:** Returns to Algonquin Park, staying at Camp Mowat on Canoe Lake.

**May 9-24:** Camps in Algonquin Park with Arthur Lismer on Molly's Island, Smoke Lake; they travel to Canoe, Ragged, Crown and Wolf Lakes.

**May 30:** Is at Parry Sound and two days later camps with Dr. MacCallum at French River; passes the next two months at MacCallum's cottage, Go-Home Bay, Georgian Bay, sketching in the region.

**Early August:** Paddles and portages to Algonquin Park, travelling north along the French River to Lake Nipissing, then via South River to the park.

**Mid-September:** Is joined by A.Y. Jackson and they travel to and paint at Canoe, Smoke and Ragged Lakes.

**Early October:** They are joined by Arthur Lismer, his wife Esther, and their daughter, Marjorie, F.H. Varley and his wife, Maud.

**Mid-October:** Lismers and Varleys return to Toronto.

**October 23:** Jackson leaves for Toronto.

**November 18:** Thomson leaves for Toronto.

**November:** Royal Canadian Academy of Arts Thirty-seventh Annual Exhibition, Toronto. Thomson exhibits *A Lake, Early Spring* (possibly the canvas entitled *Petawawa Gorges*) and *Frost After Rain*. His address is given as Studio Building, Severn Street.

**December 13:** Royal Canadian Academy of Arts Patriotic Fund Sale. Thomson exhibits *In Algonquin Park*, which is purchased by the artist Marion Long for \$50.

**December** Shares a studio in the Studio Building with Franklin Carmichael.

## 1915

**March 13-April 10 :** Ontario Society of Artists Forty-third Annual Exhibition, Toronto. Thomson exhibits *Northern River, Split Rock* and *Georgian Bay Pines*. *Northern River* is bought by the National Gallery of Canada for \$500. His address is given as Studio Building, Severn Street.

**Mid-March:** Arrives in Algonquin Park, via Huntsville, where he stays at the home of Winifred Trainor for two days; he travels to Tea Lake and Big Cauchon Lake; in the Kearney area, he stays at McCann's Halfway House.

**April 28-May 19:** Thomson and George Rowe guide the Johnston Brothers of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania to Pine River; they travel to Tea Lake. On their return, Thomson and Rowe travel to Big Bear Lake.

**July 17:** Assists H.A. Callighen in bringing tourists from Joe Lake Station to Smoke Lake by canoe.

**July 21:** Returns from Swan (Rain) Lake.

**Late July or early August:** Buys a new Chestnut canoe, silk tent and other camping supplies and starts out from Canoe Lake on a long trip, likely to the Magnetawan River, coming out at South River around Labour Day.

**August 28 –September 13:** Canadian National Exhibition, Toronto. Thomson exhibits *In Georgian Bay* and *Pines, Georgian Bay*. His address is given as Studio Building, Severn Street.

**September 8-16:** Provincial Exhibition, Halifax. Thomson exhibits a canvas, *A Northern Lake, Early Spring*, and six sketches, *Canadian Wildflowers, Winter Morning, Sun in the Bush, Birches*, and two of *Autumn Colours*. The canvas is priced at \$350, the sketches \$25 each.

**September:** Paddles back up South River, crosses into North Tea Lake and Cauchon Lake, travelling perhaps as far as Mattawa.

**End September to mid-October:** At Mowat.

**Mid-October:** Visits the MacCallum cottage on Georgian Bay with J.E.H. MacDonald to measure for a series of decorative panels commissioned by Dr. MacCallum as murals for his cottage.

**November:** Camps at Round (now Kawawaymog) Lake with Tom Wattie and Dr. Robert McComb; paints at Mud Bay.

**Late November:** At first snow, travels to Huntsville for a brief stay at the home of Winifred Trainor before returning to Toronto. Moves into the shack, formerly used by a cabinet maker, behind the Studio Building on Severn Street, which he shares with Arthur Lismer.

**December-January:** Exhibits a group of sketches at the Arts and Letters Club, Toronto.

**Winter:** Paints seven decorative panels for the MacCallum cottage. When they are installed in April 1916, only three of Thomson's fit.

## 1916

**Mid-March:** Stops in Huntsville at the home of Winifred Trainor on his way to Algonquin Park.

**March 11-April 15:** Ontario Society of Artists Forty-fourth Annual Exhibition, Toronto. Thomson exhibits *The Birches, Spring Ice, Moonlight* and *The Hardwoods*. *Moonlight* is illustrated in the catalogue. *Spring Ice* is bought by the National Gallery of Canada for \$300. His address is given as the Studio Building, Severn Street.

**March:** Exhibits landscapes of Northern Ontario at the Toronto Heliconian Club.

**April or early May:** Is visited by Lawren Harris, his cousin Chester Harris and Dr. MacCallum; they travel to Lake Cauchon; Harris and Thomson then proceed on to Aura Lee Lake.

**Late May:** Takes a job as a fire ranger and reports to Achray, a park station at Grand Lake on the south branch of the Petawawa (now Barron) River, where he works with Edward Godin.

**August:** Thomson and Edward Godin canoe down the south branch of the Petawawa River to the Barron Canyon, then canoe up the north branch of the river to Lake Traverse.

**August 26-September 11:** Canadian National Exhibition, Toronto. Thomson exhibits *Moonlight*. It is reproduced in the catalogue. His address is given as Studio Building, Severn Street.

**September 13-21:** Nova Scotia Provincial Exhibition, Halifax. Thomson exhibits *The Hardwoods* priced at \$300.

**October 4:** Is at Basin Depot.

**Late October or early November:** Returns to Toronto.

**November 16-December 16:** Thirty-eighth Annual Exhibition of the Royal Canadian Academy of Arts, Montreal. Thomson exhibits *The Hardwoods*. His address is given as 25 Severn Street.

## 1917

**Early April:** Arrives at Mowat Lodge.

**April 28:** Buys a guide's licence.

**May 24:** Dr. MacCallum and his son Arthur arrive for a fishing trip.

**July 8:** Park Ranger Mark Robinson, Mrs. Thomas (the wife of the local railway section head) and Mrs. Colson (the wife of the owner of the Hotel Algonquin on Joe Lake ) see Thomson and Shannon Fraser walking down to Joe Lake Dam in the morning. Robinson notes in his diary that Thomson "left Fraser's Dock after 12:30 pm to go to tea lake Dam or west lake."

**July 16:** Thomson's body is recovered from Canoe Lake and buried at once, overlooking the lake.

**July 21:** An undertaker from Huntsville arrives to collect the body and ship it to Owen Sound on the instructions of George Thomson. It is buried in the family plot at Leith.

**September 27:** A memorial cairn with a bronze tablet designed by J.E.H. MacDonald is erected at Canoe Lake by MacDonald, J.W. Beatty, Shannon Fraser and George Rowe.