

CLARK McDOUGALL

*A Life on the Land*





# Introduction

Artists have long been drawn to the picturesque farms and barns of Elgin County but perhaps none have captured their essence as successfully as Clark McDougall. For almost 40 years, he embraced the rural environs just north of St. Thomas creating hundreds of works that have left us with a unique record of every aspect of the landscape of the farm.

Many people will remember Clark drawing and photographing the landscape north of the city, some may even have given him a lift home. With the return of the International Plowing Match and its focus on farm life, it seemed a fitting time to renew our acquaintance with Clark's work. In her exhibition *A Life on The Land*, guest curator Catherine Elliot Shaw has done just that. These works take us into the community Clark loved and provide us with some of the best examples of how he saw that landscape. It is a vision that is both unvarnished and at times elegiac.

Accompanying *A Life on the Land* is an installation of the *Carnation Milk Can Assemblage* created by Clark's friend Dan Patterson whose house and farm frequently appear in the artist's work. Promoted by Clark and London artist Greg Curnoe, the work eventually found its way into a major naive art exhibition in Europe and then into the permanent collection of the National Gallery of Canada.

The Elgin County Museum would like to thank the individuals and institutions that have generously loaned works to the exhibition and allowed for their reproduction here. The contributions of many people to *A Life on the Land* are likewise acknowledged particularly that of Catherine Elliot Shaw who has assembled some of the best of Clark McDougall's rural landscapes as well as Robert Ballantine, catalogue design; Paddy Gunn O'Brien, catalogue editor; Bob Ostoff, installation; and the staff from the National Gallery of Canada who oversaw the loan and installation of the Patterson work.

Mike Baker, Curator  
Elgin County Museum



CLARK MCDUGALL '43

CLARK  
McDOUGALL

# *A Life on the Land*

Catherine Elliot Shaw

*Right now I am hooked on landscape. This time of year, I fall completely in love with the landscape north of here 2 or 3 miles out. I get absolutely homesick for some spots and have to go out for an afternoon. It is like a secret rendezvous with a mysterious lover. Sometimes I think that I could write about [it] on the spot instead of the drawing that I make. I can't explain what being alone on a spot does to me... some extremely deep thing that can make me terribly happy, depressed, —all kinds of emotions. I go back almost 40 years of experiences and the various landscapes will extract recall in my mind that will give me all of these reactions.<sup>1</sup>*

FOR CLARK MCDUGALL, the rural panorama of his beloved Elgin County was more than just the inspiration for his artistic investigations. It was the place in which he could immerse himself in what he called its “subjects” and, through them, connect with his unique and evocative observations. This exhibition celebrates the man whose daily discoveries created an ordered world of working farms, forgotten barn and house interiors, and beckoning concession roads.



It began at an early age as the pre-teen roamed North Yarmouth township on sketching trips. It was not necessarily an entire scene he sought but the components that he would later seamlessly and convincingly amalgamate into a painting. An angry cloud here, a patch of dying flower stalks there, though gathered perhaps on different days and in different locales, might eventually become integrated into his compositions. This documentation took many forms, as evidenced in the Clark McDougall Archives now housed at the McIntosh Gallery at The University of Western Ontario: thousands of slides meticulously organized by date, time of day, location and weather; hundreds of sketches with notations about colour, texture and light quality; large cartoons as part of the preparatory process for finished paintings; unfinished panels on masonite; and personal journals from the last six years of his life. In some instances we can trace the origins of some of his iconic paintings from slide to graphite sketch to colour study to transfer cartoon to finished work. Together, they reveal much about the artist, his process and his attention to detail.

In his early watercolours of working farms, we see the beginnings of his fascination with light and its effect on colour. Haystacks stand starkly in the heat or dissolve in lengthening shadows at the end of the day. Pale sun bleakly warms a woodlot in early spring as the onset of dusk threatens to absorb the inhabitants in growing darkness. Later, he found markers and crayons a faster way to record the landscape in a sort of gestural shorthand. Collectively, this was a working method which, as it continued throughout his career, provided him with endless material, sometimes from unexpected directions:

*When I sketch on location, I always start with the first thing that turns me on. This first sketch seems to help trigger a whole succession of subjects. The starting selection may not be a first-rate choice, but to reject it can trigger a counter action which can cause your selective mechanism to falter. On the other hand, once the first choice has been made and completed, then the selective process seems to get better, or 'hotter'. More subjects may suddenly reveal themselves. There are days when everything becomes a subject. So much depends on the sky and the lighting of the day.<sup>2</sup>*

He made lifelong friendships with area farmers as he returned again and again to encounter something new: "Usually when I discover a new farm for subject matter I want to milk it dry, so to speak, and a new farm for subject matter is most often a very old farm, loaded with character."<sup>3</sup> The farms, some of which came to be known in his titles simply as Locke's, Fowler's, Bucke's,



Patterson's, and Munroe's, were documented in detail throughout the year. Often, he found the desired character in the interiors of barns where horse-drawn sleighs, broken-down wagons, and well-worn planking attested to the farming practices of days gone by. Charcoal sketches helped him work out compositional problems for more formal paintings; they also allowed him to allocate the full range of monochromatic tones required for grass, woodgrain, concrete blocks and other textures. This then provided the necessary understanding of how colour could be applied later as these images became more and more abstracted.

Interiors, often of barns and abandoned houses, also held a particular resonance for him as repositories of their absent owners. Their hidden corners of melancholy speak eloquently of the hard work required on a family farm. Perhaps too, they are a sort of memorial to a way of life already changing even then. He felt an indescribable pull to explore and document them before they and the essence of life imbedded in them disappeared forever. The places which had once seen fields neatly plowed, crops harvested and animals lovingly tended were now little more than evocative shells and he mourned the loss of their unique historical insights: "In 1963, I discovered a farm in North Yarmouth township ...[b]ut the farm changed hands after the owner died, really not too long after I discovered it, and modernization took place—curses—destroying material enough for 20 years."<sup>4</sup> In all of these settings, he thoughtfully provides the viewer with a psychological exit from the pervading sadness. Whether looking in or out, he makes it possible to escape the claustrophobic colour and detail for spaces beyond.

His paintings of barns capture those proud sentinels of farm activity as they stand regally at the side of a road or hover on the horizon. These images are curiously devoid of human activity, as if it is the structures themselves which are the true inhabitants of this land. They are an integral part of the terrain like the trees and the fences and the plant life, acting as anchors for the constellations of energy throughout the seasons. The promise of melting snows in early spring gives way to the exuberance of summer and the wistful settling of fall. Characteristically, the artist provides the viewer with an entry point into the scene—across a field, over a fence, up a laneway—to wander around a mystical world of his making. The nuanced colour imbedded in the old timbers reveals even more of their individual personalities as its gritty luminescence activates the surfaces and layers them with a surreal quality. Ultimately, however, his paintings are about the feelings these constructions created in him and his relentless need to share them with others:



*I will think about this subject, on and off as it keeps actively prodding my memory. Perhaps eventually I will paint it. But when I do paint it, I will not be painting the scene there before me but the actual joy I felt to-day and all other summer days spent out at Bucke's farm.<sup>5</sup>*

For many years, Clark McDougall bicycled throughout the county, always expecting to find new material in familiar places:

*A subject matter that I know well does help. Having stuck to the same landscape area most of my life, I can agree with Graham Sutherland who said something like this: that he might see the same locale a hundred times and pass it by. Yet one day it becomes a subject.<sup>6</sup>*

Travelling at a slower pace, rather than in an automobile, probably allowed him to focus for longer periods of time and to satisfy his insatiable need to see objects in depth. Later, after a coronary forced him to abandon his bicycle, his brother Don or one of several friends would transport him to a preferred location for the day during which he could make copious photographs and sketches. Thus, while roads are virtually non-existent in his large farmyard paintings, they sometimes appear as laneways leading to a field or barn in the distance and are often used as the familiar compositional device to bisect the land and the associated scene. This not only ensured a perfectly balanced composition but also firmly directed the viewer past the objects on either side to converge on the inviting visuals at the panoramic horizon line. Even the carefully placed details to establish a convincing foreground cannot hold our attention back from eventually zooming along that road.

Equally dynamic are the images where roads angle in from the side only to disappear at the horizon or coquettishly around a curve. Like the barn and house interiors, he provides a comfortable entry and exit site while shifting focus to his actual subjects of surrounding fields, ditches, telephone poles, fence lines and even distant barns. Here too, though these objects signify all too obvious human incursion, the landscape is also oddly bereft of people, another poetic presence of absence. For all their dynamism, these images convey quite a different intention from those with the clear, centrally located roads; the former invites us, even pushes us, into a journey to discover what is beyond that far horizon, while the latter plants a firm barrier to that new and unknown destination. Could this reflect the artist's own ambivalence toward his



relationship with the landscape, or perhaps a certain urgency in trying to achieve his artistic ambitions, particularly toward the end of his life? In the occasional letter and journal entry, we glimpse his mounting frustrations:

*I go back almost 40 years of experiences and the various landscapes will extract recall in my mind that will give me all of these reactions. The only difference is that up to a point in time the blue horizon of a landscape was an infinity of hope for tomorrow and now that same blue horizon is a time clock that ticks away and also chips away at your future.<sup>7</sup>*

In this exhibition, we see how Clark McDougall was equally adept in a variety of media—charcoal, ink and pencil sketches, felt tip marker drawings and paintings in watercolour, oil and acrylic—and continually adapted them to his purpose. Ultimately, he developed his signature painting technique of surrounding and heightening sections of pure colour with thick lines of black paint. Originally composed of a combination of alizarin crimson and ultramarine blue, he eventually replaced it with black oil paint and then black enamel because it dried more quickly and allowed him to continue working without fear of muddying the other colours. His expanding sense of colour understood how to control, juxtapose, and tease it into combinations which, while not always subtle, were nevertheless always built on a clear and stable composition. By the latter part of his career, he had reduced the underlying structure of his black enamel paintings to a bare minimum; his fascination lay as much or more in the challenge of painting as it did in capturing the visual adventure:

*Black enamel appeals to my interest in the abstract side of the painting problem. Therefore I feel that black enamel solves this paint problem much better than if I used a traditional painting approach. It can be said, that I am more interested in the mechanics of the paint problem than in that which I am trying to represent.<sup>8</sup>*

Yet, no matter how nonrepresentational the patterning became, the work never lost its integrity as a creative image.

In a world that privileges the primacy of photographic realism, Clark McDougall's rich legacy of a painted response to the regional landscape continues to captivate. His exacting impressions of Elgin County, its farms, homesteads and roadways, first and foremost speak of what for many of us



constitutes another world. His early harvest watercolours, on-the-spot sketches, and formal portraits of barn and farmhouse personalities provide an irreplaceable record of a disappearing way of life and its enduring humanity so that, through his eyes, we too see the fundamental strength demanded by a life on the land.

**Catherine Elliot Shaw** is the Curator of the McIntosh Gallery at The University of Western Ontario.

#### NOTES

1. Clark McDougall letter to Nancy Postian, September 6, 1976.
2. Joan Murray. "Auguries of Innocence An Interview with Clark McDougall", *Canadian Forum*, October 1979, p14.
3. Clark McDougall letter to Hugh Sims, January 29, 1965.
4. Clark McDougall letter to Nancy Postian, August 2, 1974.
5. Clark McDougall. (1970). Quoted in catalogue: *Clark McDougall: Barns 1952-1978*. Mira Godard Gallery, Toronto.
6. Clark McDougall. (1978). Quoted in catalogue: *Clark McDougall 1921-1980*. Mira Godard Gallery, Toronto, 1983.
7. Clark McDougall letter to Nancy Postian, September 6, 1976.
8. Clark McDougall. (1978). Quoted in catalogue: *Clark McDougall: Barns 1952-1978*. Mira Godard Gallery, Toronto.



*Barns in a Landscape, 1960*





*Untitled: Farm Lane in Winter, n.d.*





Dan Patterson's Weigh Scale, 1970





View in St. Thomas, 1979



# List of Works

*Untitled: North Yarmouth*, 1943  
watercolour on paper, 36.2 x 49.2 cm  
St. Thomas-Elgin Public Art Centre  
Gift of Cecil F. Webb

*Early Spring*, c. 1945  
watercolour on paper, 34.0 x 45.6 cm  
St. Thomas-Elgin Public Art Centre  
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Donald H. Anderson

*Untitled Landscape*, 1948  
watercolour on paper mounted on  
pressed paper board, 40.7 x 51 cm  
Collection of McIntosh Gallery, The  
University of Western Ontario  
Gift of Edwin R. Procnunier, 1993

*Untitled: Farm on #52 East of Radio  
Road*, 1957  
oil on masonite, 71.8 x 92.1 cm  
St. Thomas-Elgin Public Art Centre  
Donated in Memory of Baillie  
Stephenson

*Barns in a Landscape*, 1960  
oil on board, 55.5 x 101.5 cm  
Museum London, Gift of Richard and  
Beryl Ivey, Toronto, 2007

*Untitled Landscape*, (*Charlie Rowe's  
Lane*), 1963  
oil on masonite, 48.5 x 60.9 cm  
Collection of McIntosh Gallery, The  
University of Western Ontario,  
Purchase, Abbott Fund with assistance  
from Wintario, 1986

*Locke's Farm*, 1963  
Marker and crayon on paper,  
35.5 x 43 cm  
Collection of McIntosh Gallery, The  
University of Western Ontario, Gift of  
Marion McDougall in memory of Clark  
McDougall, 2004

*Untitled: Winter Landscape with Side  
of Barn*, 1964  
acrylic on masonite, 80 x 59.7 cm  
Museum London, Gift of Marian and  
Alfred Murray, Islington, Ontario,  
1988

*Fowler's Front Door*, 1966  
oil on masonite, 81 x 61 cm  
Museum London, Gift of Mr. Edwin R.  
Procnunier, London, Ontario, 1992

*Fowler's Farm*, 1966  
oil on masonite, 60 x 80 cm  
St. Thomas-Elgin Public Art Centre  
Gift of Richard B. Perkins, O.D.

*From Fowler's Kitchen*, 1968  
oil and black enamel on masonite  
83.2 x 62.9 cm  
St. Thomas-Elgin Public Art Centre  
Permanent Collection, Permanent  
Loan "The Queen's Silver Jubilee Art  
Collection"

*Dan Patterson's Weigh Scale*, 1970  
oil and black enamel on board  
101.6 x 111.8 cm  
Private Collection

*Interior at Fowler's Barn*, 1971  
charcoal and white pastel on paper  
86.4 x 76.2 cm  
Private Collection

*By Radio Road*, 1973  
charcoal and graphite on paper  
84.3 x 104.5cm  
St. Thomas-Elgin Public Art Centre,  
Gift of Jim and Eva Fishbach

*12th Concession CPR*, 1977  
marker on paper, 35.5 x 43 cm  
Collection of McIntosh Gallery, The  
University of Western Ontario, Gift of  
Marion McDougall in memory of Clark  
McDougall, 2004  
*Bucke's Barn*, 1978  
silkscreen on paper, 52 x 62.6 cm  
Collection of McIntosh Gallery, The  
University of Western Ontario, Gift of  
Barb and Jens Thielsen, 2007

*Near 13th Concession*, 1978  
silkscreen on paper, 48 x 61.9 cm  
Collection of McIntosh Gallery, The  
University of Western Ontario, Gift of  
Barb and Jens Thielsen, 2007

*View in St. Thomas*, 1979  
watercolour on paper, 56.5 x 75.5 cm  
Museum London, Gift of Mrs. Joan  
Murray, Whitby, Ontario, 1999

*Untitled barn interior*, 1980  
oil and black enamel on masonite  
91.2 x 121.9 cm  
Collection of McIntosh Gallery, The  
University of Western Ontario, Gift of  
Marion McDougall in memory of Clark  
McDougall, 2004

*Unfinished panel - barn interior*, n.d.  
oil and black enamel on masonite  
121.9 x 91.4 cm  
Collection of McIntosh Gallery, The  
University of Western Ontario, Gift of  
Marion McDougall in memory of Clark  
McDougall, 2004

*Untitled: Farm Lane in Winter*, n.d.  
watercolour on paper mounted on  
masonite, 80 x 59.7 cm  
Museum London, Gift of Marian and  
Alfred Murray, Islington, Ontario,  
1988

*Untitled landscape*, n.d.  
marker on paper, 53 x 42 cm  
Collection of McIntosh Gallery, The  
University of Western Ontario, Gift of  
Marion McDougall in memory of Clark  
McDougall, 2004

*Untitled preparatory sketch*, n.d.  
graphite and ink on paper,  
21 x 25.5 cm  
Collection of McIntosh Gallery, The  
University of Western Ontario, Gift of  
Marion McDougall in memory of Clark  
McDougall, 2004

*Untitled preparatory sketch*, n.d.  
graphite and ink on paper  
19 x 25.5cm  
Collection of McIntosh Gallery, The  
University of Western Ontario, Gift of  
Marion McDougall in memory of Clark  
McDougall, 2004

*Untitled (haying scene)*, n.d.  
watercolour and graphite on matte  
44 x 54 cm  
Collection of McIntosh Gallery, The  
University of Western Ontario, Gift of  
Marion McDougall in memory of Clark  
McDougall, 2004

Sketchbook  
Collection of McIntosh Gallery  
The University of Western Ontario  
Gift of Marion McDougall in memory  
of Clark McDougall, 2004

# Clark McDougall

Selected dates in the life of Clark McDougall taken from the catalogue for *John Street is a one-way street Clark McDougall Retrospective 1921-1980* curated by Paddy O'Brien, London Regional Art Gallery, 1987

## 1921

Born November 21, 56 Inkerman Street, St. Thomas (where he lived all his life except for the period 1939-1945). Went to Balaclava Street Public School and St. Thomas Collegiate Institute.

## 1932

Met St. Thomas painters W. St. Thomas Smith and Ross Osgoode – from then on had them as friends and critics.

## 1933

Began to paint from nature. First attempts in watercolour. Subjects from North Yarmouth (north of St. Thomas). Taught himself technique from books borrowed from St. Thomas Public Library...*The History of British Watercolour Painting* by Cundall; *Technique of Landscape Painting in Oils* by Sir Alfred East.

## 1937

Left school. Supported himself by selling paintings. Read about American painter Charles Burchfield in one of the first *Life* magazines. Travelled to Buffalo to meet him and have him criticize work. Also to the Albright-Knox School for the same purpose. In both cases he was advised that he would probably benefit very little from formal instruction. Watercolour "heroes" were John Sell Cotman, Richard Parkes Bonington, Winslow Homer.

## 1939

Tried to join Air Force. Transferred to war work because of leaky heart valve.

## 1940

Fleet Aircraft-Fort Erie. Layout work for sheet metal. Then Sutton Horsley Instrument Co., Toronto. Returned to St. Thomas practically every weekend for five years.

## 1943

First exhibition at Robert Mellors Fine Art Gallery in Toronto.

## 1944

Attended Ontario College of Art, Toronto, for one week. (They told him same thing as Burchfield, decided it wouldn't help).

## 1945

Exhibited watercolour landscapes at Lenora Morton Gallery, New York (May 21 - June 9). Did some teaching at Arthur Voaden School. Gave classes in his own home, also at Strathroy. Married Muriel Enid Tidy in October.

NOTE: Clark had a car for a short while after the war but got into an accident; after that he used a bicycle until his coronary, then hitched rides to locations with his brother Don and other friends.

## 1946

Commissioned by E.L. Cockshutt to paint the Cockshutt Memorial Shield for the Zion United Church in Brantford, in memory of those killed in World War II. Exhibited with the Buffalo Society of Artists at the Hotel Statton, Buffalo, April 20-28.

## 1950

Began painting in oils. Exhibited in *3rd Annual Winter Exhibition*, Art Gallery of Hamilton. With his wife and Brock Davis visited Montreal and Quebec City. Saw paintings by Henri Matisse, James Wilson Morrice and John Lyman which had a decisive impact on his painting, use of colour, and way of looking at the landscape.

## 1952

Rented a room from farmer friend Al Joe Kalen at Elmira and painted throughout the summer at Glen Allan.

## 1954

Commissioned by the Elgin County Board of Education to do a series of murals for the entrance lobby of the Central Elgin Collegiate Institute, St. Thomas. (Dedicated on November 19). What Clark refers to as his "Fauve" period. Painted again at Glen Allan. Also at Port Stanley. Attended a symposium at Albright-Knox Gallery, Buffalo, to hear Clement Greenberg. Showed Greenberg some of his Port Stanley paintings. Greenberg liked them and was encouraging. (Did painting there of East Broadway which was eventually printed as a serigraph by Editions Canada). Taught evening classes to the West Elgin Art Club at West Elgin District High School.

## 1955

Commissioned by Monsignor Morrison to paint a set of fourteen Stations of the Cross for Holy Angels Church, St. Thomas.

**1957**

Suffered a heart attack and confined indoors for three months. Paints *Fresh Fish at Port* – refers to it as start of the black enamel style. (“...is all ready to be used with black enamel, and it is almost there.”) *Release of the Thistledown* uses black oil outline. Uses casein for the first time.

**1959**

Exhibition: London Public Library and Art Museum (reviewed by Lenore Crawford in the *London Free Press*).

**1960**

Exhibitions: Shute Institute, Grand Avenue, London.

**1962**

Black enamel first appears. Begins to alternate between semi-abstract and representational approaches as a regular way of working.

**1965**

Death of his wife in Toronto (March 24).

**1967**

Painted the Provincial Shields and the Federal Coat of Arms for Parkside Collegiate, St. Thomas.

**1968**

Exhibition at the 20/20 Gallery, London (Oct. 15-Nov.3). (Reviewed by Lenore Crawford in the *London Free Press*).

**1969**

*Talbot Street 1964* purchased by Art Gallery St.Thomas-Elgin, April. Henry Luce III, Chairman *Time* magazine Board, purchased *Yonge and Dundas 1* and *Interior, Port Burwell Anglican Church*.

**1972**

Retrospective exhibition at the Art Gallery St.Thomas-Elgin. Included in *London Collects* London Public Library and Art Museum, Oct. 6-30.

**1973**

11 Paintings purchased by Canada Council Art Bank.

**1974**

Solo exhibition of 14 black enamel paintings, Art Gallery St. Thomas-Elgin. Included in *Canadian Canvas*, a travelling exhibition sponsored by Time Canada.

**1976**

Two black enamel oils included in *The Artist and the Olympic Idea* Art Gallery St. Thomas-Elgin (Aug. 24-Sept. 4). (Both portraits of Oneida Indian Dave Summers). Commissioned by Volunteer Committee to the London Regional Art Gallery to do the *Site* painting (also drawing and Editions Canada print). Included in the *Ontario Community Collects* exhibition (Art Gallery of Ontario).

**1977**

Major exhibition at the Vancouver Art Gallery *Clark McDougall: Paintings since 1953* (April 2-May 1, 47 works), selected by Alvin Balkind.

**1978**

Painted last black enamel painting *Pin Ball Palace* (reproduced on cover of *The Business Quarterly*, UWO). Michael Kompf printed a photolithographic edition of four black and white and four colour serigraph prints made by Editions Canada.

**1979**

Included in the Queen’s Silver Jubilee Travelling exhibition with *Fowler’s Kitchen*. (Now in collection of Art Gallery St. Thomas-Elgin). First showing of videotape *Outline in Black* (produced by John Stirling).

**1980**

Exhibition at McMaster University Medical Centre Art Gallery, Hamilton (Feb. 4-Mar. 4). Included in Art Bank travelling exhibition (Harbourfront; Cambridge Art Gallery; Feb. 22-Nov. 8). Included in *London and Area Artists Part 1*, London Regional Art Gallery (Aug. 22-Sept. 28). August - Clark’s mother went to hospital (aged 100-she died at 102).

Died on December 17 (brain tumour).

## Dan Patterson's Milk Tins

Clark McDougall

When we were kids and learned to peddle our bikes, all of us came to know Dan Patterson. Dan lived alone along side Kettle Creek and on a main road about 5 miles north of St. Thomas. His house was always interesting because it had no hydro and there you could find oil lamps in use, a battery radio, and a small type wood stove. Behind the main house along side the barn was a log cabin which is reputed now to be about 125 years old. The log cabin was used to house implements and a bench with vise, plus tools. There were unused turkey pens stored upstairs in the log house, and on the main floor lay a conglomeration of cubistic iron which was an invention Dan had been working on for years. The landscape on Dan's farm was picturesque. Part of the farm was in a valley and on the north edge stood a hard maple bush, part Dan's and part Alf Bucke's, his neighbour. In the spring Dan and Jim Patterson, his cousin, made maple syrup, using an old wood stove to heat the sap. Dan kept horses and a few cattle. The cattle were generally pastured on his land by his neighbours.

I started to sketch around Dan's farm when I was about 12 years old and as a result came to know him quite well. Dan enjoyed seeing these small watercolours made around his farm and quite often would stop his work to stay with me while I was working. He was an excellent shot and I can remember that one morning while painting a watercolour, I noticed a groundhog standing no more than 20 feet from me. I never realized Dan was around until a shot rang out and the groundhog lay still. Dan had been coming through the field behind me hunting groundhogs, who ate his beans, and very shortly he came up to me with a grin on his face saying "Ah, I didn't know you were here."

By not having electricity in his house and not keeping milk cattle, the main problem, for Dan, was to keep bought milk fresh and cool in the summer. Dan solved this by buying small Carnation milk cans. These cans would last about 2-3 days. As the years went by, the empty milk cans kept collecting and eventually Dan started to construct a huge pyramid of empty milk cans in a back kitchen, not in use. He told me that he fooled people by glueing the bottom cans down to the floor, and this formed a solid base. Eventually the pyramid must have housed around 1500 cans and it was a thing of beauty, that is until one morning when Dan tossed some fire wood on the floor and the whole pyramid fell in.

Some time after this Dan decided to reconstruct his tower and in his new work he designed the cans to fit together somewhat like a 4 poster bed. Stovepipe wire suspended to the floor and ceiling, held the cans rigid. When the new arrangement was completed there must have been 16-17 hundred cans used, and Dan allowed for extra cans to be added.

I told Art Goodwin of CFPL TV about the cans and one morning Art recorded all this on film. Later, the film was shown on Panorama news. Unfortunately, Dan never saw this because by not having electricity, he had no television set.

The Carnation milk people visited Dan and photographed this art for their own use. I have never had this information verified but I am told that the cans are shown on a billboard in the state of Texas.

Many people have come out to see the collection and Dan has had inquiries from people many miles away. Maybe Dan's next project may be some kind of arrangement made from the used flash bulbs which photo fans leave in the back kitchen.

*Region Magazine*, Number 5, February, 1963

Dan Patterson, *Carnation Milk Can Assemblage* 1947-1963  
Carnation milk cans, wire  
228.6 x 175.3 x 320 cm  
National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa  
Photo © National Gallery of Canada



**Clark McDougall: A Life on the Land**  
**Elgin County Museum**  
**September 11 to November 27, 2010**

**CREDITS**

Guest Curator: Catherine Elliot Shaw  
Installation: Bob Ostoff  
Catalogue Design: Robert Ballantine  
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Promotion: Dorothy Gebert

**LENDERS TO THE EXHIBITION**

McIntosh Gallery, The University of Western Ontario  
St. Thomas-Elgin Public Art Centre  
Museum London  
Private Collection

Cover: *Barns in a Landscape*, 1960, Collection of Museum London, Gift of Richard and Beryl Ivey, Toronto, 2007

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