

## Expand your Group of Seven experience beyond the gallery walls!

### Visit the Tom Thomson Shack

In 1914, Lawren Harris and Dr. James McCallum purchased land on Severn Street in the Rosedale ravine in Toronto on which they built a studio offering low-rental space for Canadian painters. Now a National Historic Site of Canada, the Studio Building gave artists, including Tom Thomson and A.Y. Jackson, a place to live, work, and socialize.

Behind the Studio Building stood a small shack, previously occupied by a cabinet maker and later used as a tool shed during the studio's construction. By the fall of 1915, Thomson had moved into the shack apparently out of economic necessity, paying just one dollar a month in rent. The arrangement allowed the artist to live as he would in the north country – cooking his own meals, sleeping, painting, and hiking through the ravine – while at the same time keeping him in close contact with his fellow painters. The shack was to be Thomson's home and studio until his untimely death in 1917.



A.Y. Jackson (1882-1974), Tom Thomson's Shack c.1942,  
Graphite on paper,  
22.1 x 29.7 cm, Gift of Founders, Robert and Signe McMichael,  
McMichael Canadian Art Collection, 1966.16.103.

Several changes and repairs were made to the modest building in order to accommodate Thomson, including the addition of a large window along the east wall. The artist also constructed for himself a bunk, shelves, a table and an easel. Thomson's shack soon became a gathering place for his friends and colleagues. Arthur Lismer, Lawren Harris, J.E.H. MacDonald, F.H. Varley, and Franklin Carmichael among others, were known to assemble there regularly to discuss the news over a pipe and a meal of beans or mulligan stew prepared by Thomson himself.

After spending the warmer months sketching in the Park, Thomson would return to the shack to continue his work. During the three winters he spent there, Thomson painted approximately twenty canvases including two of his most celebrated works: *The West Wind* and *The Jack Pine*.

After Thomson's death in 1917, the shack was used occasionally by a number of artists, among them A.Y. Jackson, Fred Varley, sculptor Frances Gage, and a prospector named Keith MacIver, who made a series of repairs to the deteriorating building.

It was eventually purchased by Robert and Signe McMichael and moved to the gallery grounds in 1962, along with Thomson's original easel and two of his palettes. While the details of its full history are somewhat unknown, the Tom Thomson Shack represents an important piece of Canadian history and offers visitors a glimpse into the life and work of one of the country's most enigmatic artists.

## Visit the McMichael Artists' Cemetery

The McMichael cemetery is the final resting place for six members of the Group of Seven, their spouses, and the gallery's founders, Robert and Signe McMichael. While it was a provision of the 1965 Gift Agreement that the founders be buried on the gallery grounds, the consecrated cemetery was not established until 1968 at the suggestion of A.Y. Jackson and A.J. Casson.

In his book, *One Man's Obsession*, Robert McMichael recalls receiving a letter from Jackson in 1967, in which the artist expressed a hope to be buried near Kleinburg. A few months later, while Jackson and Casson were visiting the McMichaels, the idea of a memorial cemetery for members of the Group of Seven began to take shape. In the spring of 1968, Jackson fell seriously ill and the need for a burial ground on the gallery premises became pressing. The McMichaels had to select an appropriate location for the cemetery that would be accessible, yet quiet and dignified. They soon settled on a small grassy knoll with views of the river valleys, the woods, the Tom Thomson Shack and the distant roofs of the gallery. Later, the McMichaels arranged to have the Department of Highways bring carefully selected slabs of granite, blasted during road building in the artists' beloved north country, to the site. They were carved by Canadian sculptor, E.B. Cox and used as grave markers.

While his illness had prompted the cemetery's construction, Jackson lived for several more years at the home of Robert and Signe McMichael.

The chronological development of the cemetery is as follows:

- **Arthur Lismer (1885-1969):** Lismer died in Montreal, Quebec on March 23, 1969 and was brought to Kleinburg for burial on April 25, 1969. His wife Esther (1879-1976) was buried with him.
- **Frederick Horsman Varley (1881-1969):** Varley died on September 8, 1969, was cremated on September 13 and interred the following week.
- **Lawren Stewart Harris (1885-1970):** Harris died in Vancouver, British Columbia on January 29, 1970 and was cremated. His ashes, along with those of his wife, Bess (1889-1969), were interred at the McMichael on March 20, 1970.
- **Alexander Young Jackson (1882-1974):** Jackson died on April 5, 1974 and was buried in a graveside service on April 8, 1974.
- **Frank Johnston (1888-1949):** Johnston died July 9, 1949 and was originally buried at Mount Pleasant Cemetery in Toronto. He was disinterred and reinterred at the McMichael on March 13, 1975. His wife, Florence, is buried with him.
- **Alfred Joseph Casson (1898-1992):** Casson died on February 19, 1992 in Toronto and was buried on February 20, 1992. His wife, Margaret (1900-1992) is buried with him.
- **Robert McMichael (1921-2003):** Robert McMichael died on November 18, 2003 and was buried on November 24 following visitation and a funeral service at the gallery.
- **Signe McMichael (1921-2007):** Signe McMichael died on July 4, 2007. The gallery was closed for visitation and a funeral held on July 9.