

From the National Film Board of Canada

# NOTMAN'S WORLD

William Notman was a man of rare talent. Photography was still in its infancy when he opened his first studio—in Montreal—in the late 1850s. He rapidly turned his art, and a budding technology, into a highly successful business. Within five years he was appointed Photographer to the Queen.

Not content with doing mere portraiture, he saw photography as a means of documenting history. With the use of props in his studio, composite photographs, and calling on his background as a trained artist, Notman immortalized the people and places of North America.

Like **The Civil War** series by Ken Burns, **Notman's World** re-creates history through archival photographs. But this film goes beyond the re-creation of the past to question how photographs shape our sense of history.

**Director: Albert Kish**  
**Producer: Bill Brind**

28 minutes 59 seconds  
Order number: C 0189 117

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**U.S.**

NOTMAN'S  
WORLD

VHS  
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# NOTMAN'S WORLD

"A photograph is an exciting tool for understanding the past.  
You take a picture today, and tomorrow it's history."



- American Film & Video Festival Finalist
- "...an excellent production"  
—Video Rating Guide For Libraries
- "Technically and artfully produced..."  
—Choice Magazine



# NOTMAN'S WORLD

"With a photograph, you know that this is exactly what the camera saw. We're lucky to have these books. When Notman was taking Amaro-types and tin-types there was no need to keep records, because there was only one. You couldn't come back and re-order. If you wanted another portrait, you had to have another portrait taken. But with the introduction of the glass negative, then innumerable prints could be made. And so Notman soon realized that he had to keep records."

-from **Notman's World**

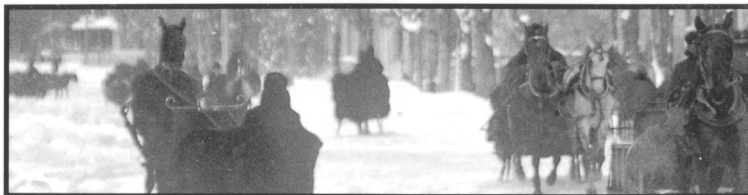
When 31-year-old William Notman opened his first photography studio in the late 1850s, he met with almost instant success. Suddenly, you didn't have to be famous to have your portrait done.

From merchants and their families, to adventurers, to the notables of the time, all entered Notman's studio from beneath his famous portico.

"Notman wasn't a documentary photographer as it's understood today, where you find whatever's wrong and you take pictures of what's wrong. He found what was right and took pictures of that."

- from **Notman's World**

Even the less privileged of the Victorian age were photographed by Notman in what he called "views" - idealized scenes of North America at work. These photographs of lumbering, fishing and farming were bought by a British and European public who were not only curious about the rigors of the colonial lifestyle, but were also intrigued by the New World's wintery landscape, complete with snowshoes and toboggans.



**Produced and distributed by the National Film Board of Canada**  
**Color 28 minutes 59 seconds**  
**Order number: C 0189 117 (film and video)**  
**U.S. version**

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*Special thanks to:*  
Notman Photographic  
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of Canadian History,  
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International Museum of  
Photography at George  
Eastman House,  
Rochester, New York.

"The idea that wilderness was romantic was something that people like Notman helped to create. He also documented the birth of Canada and the opening of Canada by the railway. It's an incredible story of the opening of a country."

- from **Notman's World**

Commissioned by the Canadian Pacific Railway in its efforts to attract settlers, Notman framed an "exotic" West, complete with Indians and the massive steam engines that pushed open the heartland. He is credited with being the first to frame the overpowering dimensions of the Rocky Mountains from a human perspective. In so doing, he turned fear of the wilderness into fascination and created an enduring image of the mountains as a place of recreation.

At the height of his career, Notman and his staff were shooting 14,000 photographs per year. By the time of his death, in 1891, over 20 studios were in operation in Canada and the United States.

Charles Notman, the youngest of three sons, sold the Montreal-based business in 1935. The Notman Photographic Archives was formed with the donation of negatives and prints to the McCord Museum of McGill University.

## HISTORY OF PHOTOGRAPHY

<b>1837</b>	Louis Jacques Mandé Daguerre invents photography.
<b>1839</b>	Introduction of first commercially produced camera (Daguerreotype).
<b>Late 1830s/ early 1840s</b>	William Henry Fox Talbot invents callo-type negative-positive process. Joseph Max Petzval invents high-speed lens.
<b>1860</b>	Wet plate process introduced. This process produced a negative which was capable of being reproduced an infinite number of times. Photography in the field now becomes possible due to the short exposure time.
<b>1869</b>	Introduction of color photography.
<b>1888</b>	Kodak camera makes photography accessible to the amateur.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

1. What are the key popular images that dominate our newspapers, magazines and television? What conclusions will future historians make about our own time if they study these images?
2. Find the issue of **Time** magazine that was published when you were born. What kinds of conclusions can you draw about American society by studying the photographs you see? Then read a current issue of **Time** magazine and see what kinds of conclusions you can draw about modern times.
3. If you were to create a portrait of contemporary America using your camera, what kinds of pictures would you take? Why did you make the choices you did?
4. Compare the photographic image and the televised image as documents of history. What are the advantages of one medium over the other? The disadvantages?