

The Petticoat Expeditions Series

PART 2

Frances Hopkins

A National Film Board of Canada Release



The *Petticoat Expeditions* uses the words and works of three extraordinary British women to recount their experiences in 19th-century Canada: acclaimed author Anna Jameson, who kept an account of her solitary journeys throughout Upper Canada during the 1830s, when it was unheard-of for a woman to travel alone; artist Frances Hopkins,

who depicted the legendary voyageurs and their way of life in her paintings as she travelled in the Canadian wilderness by canoe in the 1860s; and Lady Ishbel Aberdeen, social activist, who chronicled her excursions across the country in the 1890s in a photographic travelogue. This breathtaking series paints an inspiring portrait of three women who would not be constrained by convention, and ties their travels to key historical changes taking place in their times.

Part 1 looks at the life of author Anna Jameson and her two-month expedition through the Canadian wilderness.

Part 2 traces artist Frances Hopkins' journeys with the voyageurs during the final days of the fur trade in Canada.

Part 3 follows the life of Lady Aberdeen, who devoted herself to social reform and helped found both the National Council of Women of Canada and the Victorian Order of Nurses in Canada.

Narrated by: Helena Bonham-Carter

19 minutes, 32 seconds

Director: Pepita Ferrari

Order Number: C9197 126

Producer: Kent Martin

Series Order Number: 193C9197 128



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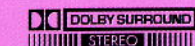
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Frances Hopkins

Photo: William Lindsay



VHS
C9197 126



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Frances Hopkins

Frances Hopkins

The final days of the fur trade in Canada have been documented by many, but few have done it as vividly and accurately as Frances Hopkins.

Frances Anne (Beechey) Hopkins (1838-1919) was born in London, England, into a family of artists and explorers, a heritage that would serve her well. Her grandfather was a famous portrait painter whose clients included royalty; her father, a military officer, drew sketches of his travels to new lands. At a time when women were considered too fragile to paint outdoors, it was likely the influence of her family background that allowed Frances to pursue her passion for landscape painting.

Frances married Edward Hopkins, who was 18 years her senior, in 1858. The couple made their home in Montreal, where Edward was stationed as an official with the Hudson's Bay Company, returning to England for periodic visits. Frances filled her sketchbooks with drawings of her new surroundings, and often accompanied her husband on his canoe trips to conduct annual inspections of the posts in his fur-trading district, which stretched as far west as Fort William on Lake Superior. Her adventures and observations during the expeditions became the subject of oil paintings that would often measure up to five feet wide.

At Fort William, she would have had the chance to observe the lives of the fur traders, the voyageurs, and the native wives who laboured at the fort while their husbands and sons navigated the waterways in birch-bark canoes.

Perhaps because she was an artist and was spending her time sketching on these long and arduous trips, Frances seems to have left very little in the way of a written record behind. In the words of Lady Frances Simpson, the wife of Hudson's Bay Company head Sir George Simpson, "A canoe voyage is not one which an English lady would take for pleasure."

But even while Frances was experiencing the Canadian wilderness in a canoe manned by voyageurs, events were taking place that signalled their way of life was about to vanish.

In 1867, Queen Victoria signed the British North America

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Producer
Kent Martin

Camera
Savas Kalogeras

Editor
Denise Beaudoin

Sound
Diane Carrière
Norman Dugas
John Martin

Original Music
Judith Gruber-
Stitzer

Starring
Lila Cano

Executive
Producer
Don Haig

Order number:
C9197 126

19 minutes
32 seconds



Act, creating the confederation of Canada; and in 1869, the American Transcontinental Railway was completed, making possible the settlement of the West. With the fur trade ending because of settlers' infringing on wild habitat, the Native people were no longer considered useful. The Canadian government began expropriating their land, without compensation or consultation, in order to accommodate settlers.

Just as she had recorded the lives of the voyageurs in her work, Frances captured their final days, including scenes of the rebellion at Red River where the Métis, led by Louis Riel, fought unsuccessfully against Canadian troops in an effort to protect their land rights.

In 1869, although it did not admit women members, the Royal Academy of London accepted one of Frances' works for exhibition: *Canoes in a Fog - Lake Superior*. That same year, Edward retired. In 1870, the Hopkinses returned to England permanently and Frances began a professional painting career.

Frances' Canadian travels remained the main subject of her work throughout her career. During her lifetime, she exhibited with the Academy a total of 11 times. Her paintings of Canadian scenery, birch-bark canoes, and the legendary voyageurs have been reproduced on stamps, as posters, and in history books, and serve as a reminder of a way of life that has since disappeared.

Questions for Discussion:

- 1) Although the Royal Academy exhibited Frances' work, it did not accept women members. What do you interpret this to mean? Do you think this way of thinking still influences what you see in art exhibitions today?
- 2) During her expeditions through the wilderness, Frances discarded or adapted her traditional Victorian apparel. How do you think society's attitude towards women was reflected in 19th-century women's clothing?

Projects:

- 1) Identify other Victorian women artists and the subjects of their works.
- 2) Retrace, in detail, the course of the canoe expedition Frances and Edward took from Montreal to Fort William.