

A.C. McIntyre

First Photographer of the Thousand Islands

by Tom French

The 1000 Islands (actually close to 2000 individual islands) is a fifty-mile stretch of the St. Lawrence River formed where the waters of the Great Lakes empty from the eastern end of Lake Ontario. The border between the United States and Canada splits this section of the river, which ranges in width from ten miles at its highest point to about a mile further down river.

For almost 150 years, it has been a tourist destination for both countries, frequented by the likes of George Pullman (of the Pullman Palace Car Company), the Newhouse family (owners of Advance Publications, one of the largest magazine and newspaper publishers in the United States), and Edward John Noble of Life Savers Candy fame. It is also where "Thousand Island" salad dressing was first made.

Alexander Carson McIntyre, or A.C. as he was known, was perhaps the most accomplished and prominent early photographer of the region. His photos became ubiquitous to the area during the late nineteenth century, and his photos were, and in some circles continue to be, synonymous with the region. Walk into any museum or browse any book associated with the history of the Thousand Islands, and you will no doubt find multiple images taken by A.C. McIntyre.

The son of a Scottish sea captain, he was born August 30, 1822, in New Brunswick, New Jersey. Little else is known about his early life until, as a recent widower, he opened a photography studio in Brockville, Ontario, in 1855.

McIntyre was at the forefront of the photographic revolution and experimented with and perfected many new technologies from the daguerreotypes that he started with in 1855, through ambrotypes, calotypes, stereo imaging, and the dry plate process that emerged in the early 1880s. At various points

"Nobby Isle." The Island was purchased by Civil War Hero Henry Heath by 1872. At 16, Heath enlisted in the 20th Regiment of the Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry, in a company commanded by future Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr. Wounded and captured in the Battle of Ball's Bluff near Leesburg, Virginia, Heath was later freed through an exchange of prisoners. After the war he became successful in real estate and developed connections with the Pullman family (of the Pullman Palace Car Company). He encouraged McIntyre to set up a photo studio in Alexandria Bay, which might also explain why McIntyre christened his yacht Nobby. This 1872 view shows an early McIntyre yellow mount, with a label printed on the back bleeding through on the left. Note the group's croquet hoops in the foreground.



McIntyre's Views of the 1000 Islands
Stereoscopic and Other Transparencies.



PATRONIZED BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES.

Alexandria Bay and 1000 Island Park

in his career he operated studios in several places, including Montreal, but it is his work in the Thousand Islands which gave him the most success and became the most enduring—so much so that his images are still alive today.

It is believed that he established his studio in Alexandria Bay, New York, in the heart of the 1000 Islands, in the early 1870s. He was certainly doing business there by 1873 when he photographed a series of stereoviews of the “ascension” of a large, lighter-than-air balloon, *The Atlantic*. He operated his Brockville, Ontario, store during the winter months, and then left it to an assistant while he went to Alexandria Bay for the summer.

The location of his Alexandria Bay store seems to have moved from year to year. Advertisements exist announcing that his shop will occupy a portion of Centennial Hall. Another announcement states he will be in “an octagon studio.” Yet another notice proclaims that he will be located in the “Blue Glass Observatory in front of the Thousand Island House.”

He clearly took thousands of photographs in his lifetime. He was available for private sessions and he sold pre-prepared souvenir stock views in his stores.

“Nobby Island.” This example of a McIntyre dark Mount, boasting the patronage of the president, is a view commonly found on an orange mount as well. The view was taken from the dock at the head of Nobby Island. If you look behind the flag, you can see the original Henry Heath cottage. The cottage is still on the island, though it appears to have been moved to the left of where it is in this photo. Measurements of the Heath Children’s heights, dating from the 1880s, can still be found etched into the door trim and written on the walls in the main room downstairs.

Most of his views were taken along the river and amongst the thousands of islands. He would have had to lug a portable dark-room tent across the water in a boat. For this purpose, he obtained, in 1875, his own steam yacht, *The Nobby*. He used it not only to get around and as a prop in his photos, but also, some believe, as a staging platform for his darkroom tent.

He obtained the yacht from Oneida Lake just north of Syracuse, New York, in May, 1875 and brought it to the Alexandria Bay area in late May via the barge canal (part of the old Erie Canal system) and Lake Ontario, a journey of almost a hundred miles. He had to put in about half way across Lake Ontario due to an abundance of ice (bergs from one to twenty-five feet) that blocked his way—something that would be considered a fluke of nature today as the ice is usually gone by mid-April. By 1879, he had purchased a larger yacht, *The Idlewild*, which allowed him to sleep over on the boat.

One version of McIntyre label listing the number of views available for various locations along the St. Lawrence River.

A. C. McIntyre,
—of Alexandria Bay, River St. Lawrence—

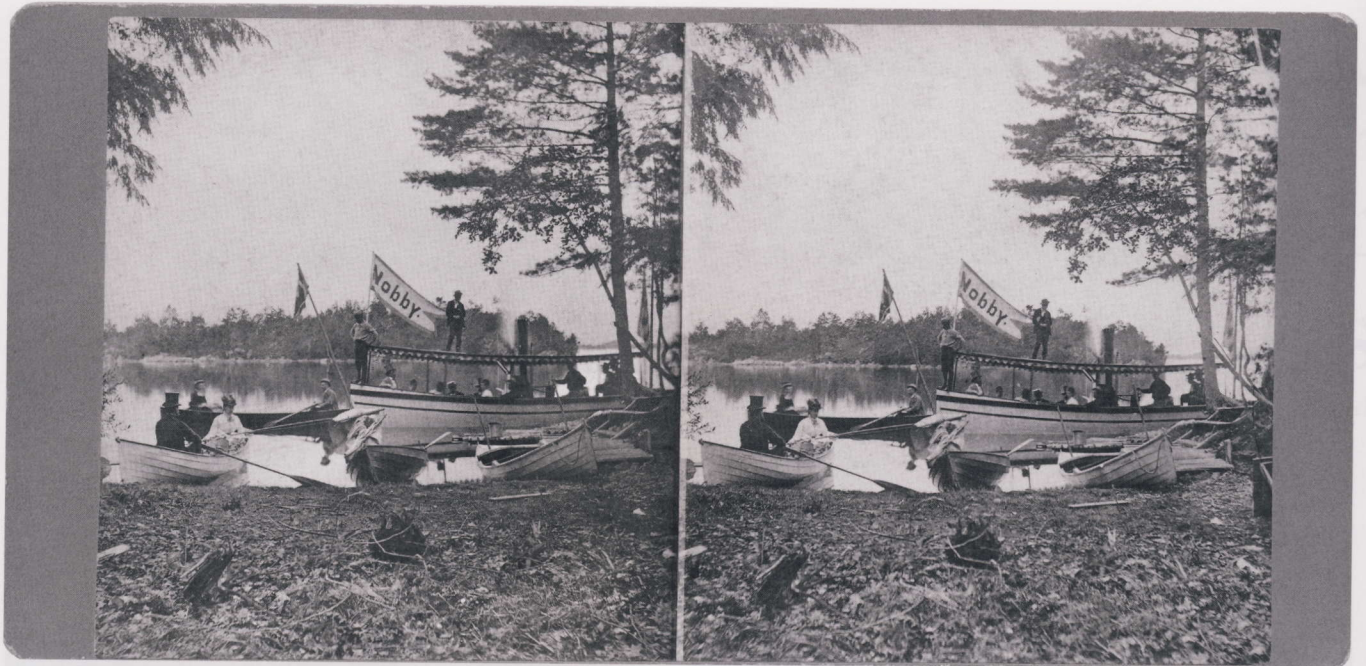
New and attractive Views of the
THOUSAND ISLANDS,
WHOLESALE AND RETAIL.

Stereoscopic Views, Large Views, size varying from 4x7
to 16x20 inches, Mounted and unmounted. Photographic Views taken to order.

STEREOSCOPIC VIEWS OF

Alexandria Bay..	from 100 different Negatives.
Bonnie Castle...	40
Manhattan Island	30
Hayden Island...	75
Pullman Island..	25
Westminster P'k.	100
Sport Island....	30
Little Lehigh...	12
Lost Channel and Fiddler's Elbow	12
1000 Island Park.	300
Round Island...	36
Fort Carlton....	24
Point Marquette.	36
General Views of the St. Lawrence	500
Brockville	50
Idlewild	30
Nobby	15

View of _____



He was an astute salesman with a knack for advertising his skills and wares, as evidenced by the various notices and advertisements that appeared in the local papers of the day. In the process, he developed a variety of labels that advertised not only his business, but also extolled the virtues of the region and other area establish-

"Nobby." (Also labeled as "View of Nobby Isle" on a different mount) This view shows the Steam Yacht Nobby, purchased by McIntyre in 1875. Orange mount. The number 52 is scratched into the negative at the lower right.

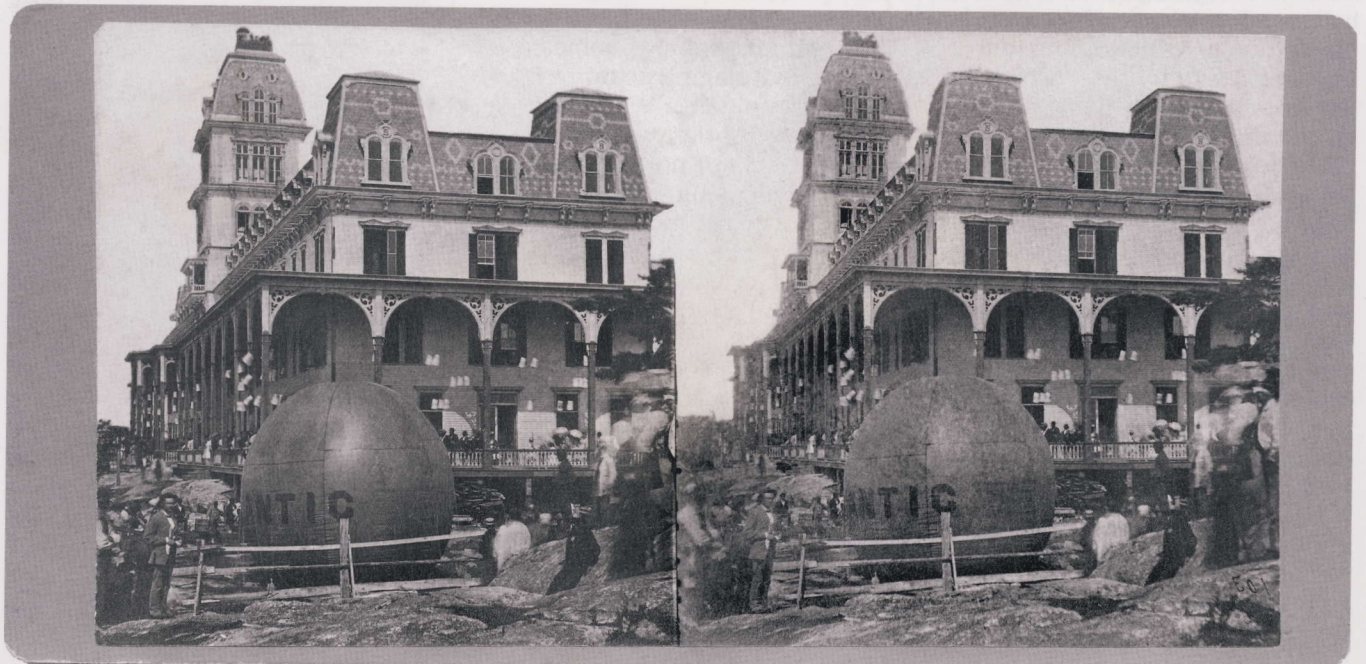
ments. His labels were copied verbatim (minus the name) by at least one other photographer, George Monroe (George Eastman's personal photography teacher).

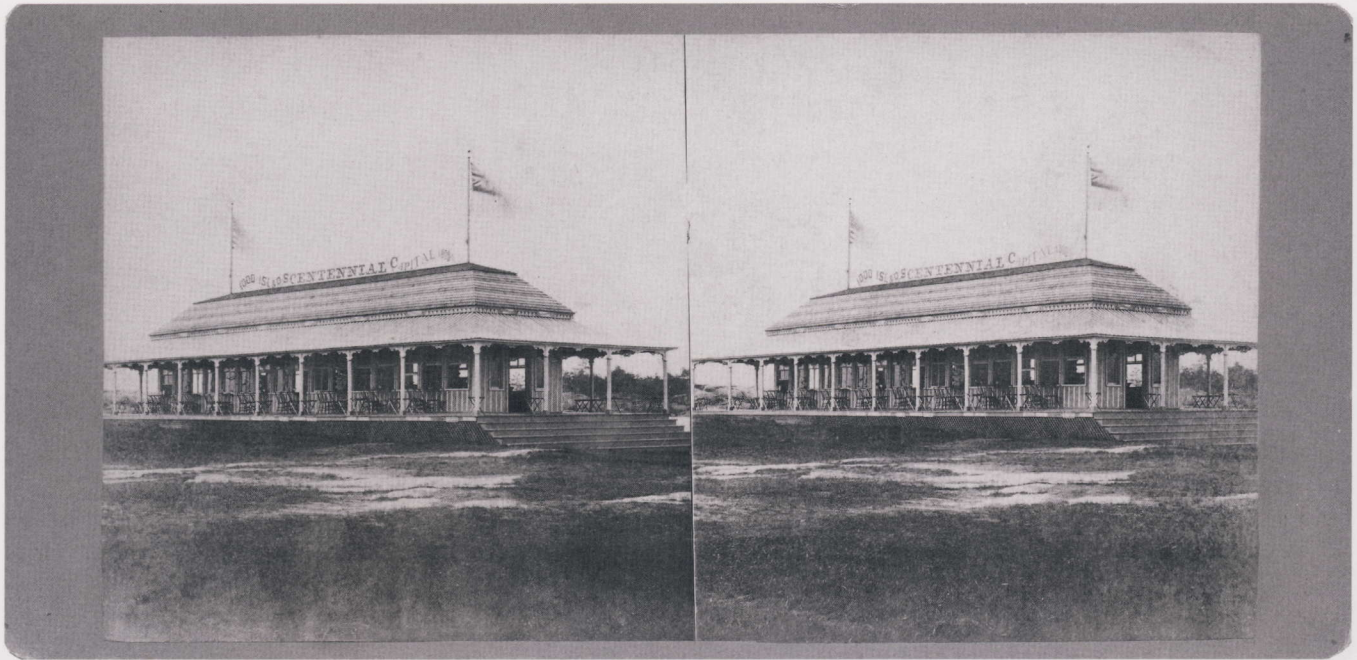
Prior to opening his studio in Alexandria Bay, he was also located

in Ogdensburg, New York, about 30 miles down river. It was during this period, beginning in about 1868, that McIntyre used yellow mounts. He continued using the yellow mounts with simple labels, often on the front of the card, for the first few years in his Alexandria Bay shop. But by mid-decade, he had switched to the orange mounts and the eloquent labels often associated with his work.

Depending upon which label was used, it might include useful

A Balloon Ascension from Thousand Island House. Reports in the local papers for July 24, 1873 indicate that the balloon, piloted by a "Professor Squire," traveled 20 miles before landing. The crowd "carried Squire in his willow basket to the edge of the river," where Squire cried out "let go." The hotel is the Thousand Island House, built the previous winter by O.G. Staples, who later went on to purchase several properties in Washington, DC, including the Willard Hotel. Number 103 is scratched into the negative at lower right. Orange mount.





"Centennial Hall, Alex Bay." If you look closely, you may note the misspelling of "islands" with an "&" instead of an "A" at the left of the sign. The hall was built in 1876 as a refreshment stand and pavilion for entertainment. The ceiling was an arched sky-blue with silver and gold stars. An announcement in the May 23, 1878 edition of *The Brockville Recorder* indicated that McIntyre would occupy a portion of Centennial Hall. His Alexandria Bay shop was at different locations from year to year and the record can be confusing. Later views of Centennial Hall show the banner on top replaced with the words "ice cream" spelled out in the roof tiles. Orange mount. Courtesy of Jack Brown

McIntyre had a numbering system, but it was never fully implemented. Even his titles are inconsistent for purposes of indexing. Many cards of the same view have different titles, and many cards of different views (of the same location) have the same title—simply the indication of the place. Most titles are handwritten. Research suggests that McIntyre had 3-5 employees

information for tourists, including railroad routes and schedules, hotels, steamer routes, and certain attractions. Although many of the McIntyre labels had a place to

indicate a number for the view, it is blank on most labels. Perhaps

Although the label on this card does not indicate a title, it is one of several views that McIntyre took during President Chester Arthur's visit to the region in 1882. President Arthur is the individual on the left. Orange mount.





in his Alexandria Bay shop during the summer season, and several different handwriting styles can be found. Collectors of McIntyre stereoviews are encouraged to carefully examine similarly labeled cards for subtle differences in the images—sometimes the only evidence that the two views are different exposures.

Throughout most the 1870s, his mounts were 3½ inches high, but at some point in the late 1870s or early 1880s, he began using four inch mounts as well. His later views were also on dark mounts with his name in gold lettering along both sides. There are examples of cream-colored mounts as well.

"Camp Charming." This view, published by McIntyre, shows President Ulysses S. Grant (seated in the dark suit with a top hat on his knee) during his visit to the 1000 Islands in 1872. President Grant was the guest, along with Civil War Generals William T. Sherman and Phillip H. Sheridan, of George Pullman of the Pullman Palace Car Company. Some believe the man to the left of Grant is Sheridan, but it is this author's opinion that the man is more likely the host, George Pullman. Although this view is usually attributed to McIntyre because of his label on the back, another theory is that it was actually taken by the Bain Brothers, of Clayton, New York (about 10 miles upriver), and sold to McIntyre with the rest of their collection in 1874 by James Bain when he left for Michigan. At least one McIntyre expert believes he would have advertised that he photographed President Grant had he actually taken the picture (in the way that he boasted that he was "Photographer of the President" after Chester Arthur's visit in 1882). There are several Bain views that can be found with early McIntyre labels, though I have not seen this particular view as a Bain. Orange mount.

During the course of his career, he published views recording the visits of two sitting presidents to the 1000 Islands—Ulysses Grant in 1872 and Chester Arthur ten years

later. He traveled in a circle of nationally known photographers including George Monroe and Matthew Brady. Indeed, by comparing McIntyre and Brady plates, some believe there are questionable attributions to some of Arthur's trip photos.

By a second marriage, Alexander Carson McIntyre had five sons and three daughters. Upon his death in April of 1897, one of the sons, Gordon, took over the business until his own death in 1907. At that time, the value of the estate was "less than \$200. Its inventory including 'one lot of Island negatives' valued at \$15 and '2 retouching pencils,' at ten cents." But the history he left to the region is priceless.

Sources

Some of the information in the article comes from a presentation by Frederick J. McCarthy, Ed. D., that was given at the National

McIntyre used a variety of labels that extolled the virtues of the region and other area establishments. One featured a map of the route of the Utica & Black River Railroad. Local photographer George Monroe used the identical view label seen here, but with his own name above the line drawing.

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Scenery Among the Thousand Islands, on the River St. Lawrence.
 FROM PHOTOGRAPHIC STUDIO OF THE
THOUSAND ISLAND HOUSE, ALEXANDRIA BAY, N. Y.
A. C. MCINTYRE, Artist.

THE THOUSAND ISLANDS lie along in that great body of water called a river—more properly a lake, or a fresh water ocean—between the United States and Canada. Descriptions of these islands usually seem like extravagant eulogy to those who have not seen them. Those who have passed a week or two among them, generally acknowledge, that a description is impossible. In summer the air is so cool and salubrious as

seemingly to intoxicate all who attempt to describe the scenery.

THE THOUSAND ISLAND HOUSE has come to have an unchallenged reputation as a first-class watering place House. It is very commodious, accommodating from six to seven hundred guests at a time, with every convenience for comfort, sport, society, and every form of pastime.

O. C. STAPLES, Proprietor.

No. *Haystack Island* View



"East from 1000 Island House." This Alexandria Bay view taken from the top of the Thousand Island House (the tower in the balloon view) shows McIntyre's Octagon studio (center left) on Crossmon Point. The sign on the octagon structure appears to say, "Stereoptic Views of the Thousand Islands." Centennial Hall at center. The large hotel to the right is the Crossmon House, one of the earliest hotels in Alexandria Bay. The house on the point in the distance is Bonnie Castle, built by Josiah Gilbert Holland, a famous 19th century author and friend and mentor to Emily Dickenson, Walt Whitman, and others. He was the founder and editor of Scribner's Monthly (later the Century), and bought his river property with the money he made from his novel, Arthur Bonniecastle. Orange mount.

Tom French/Nellie Taylor collection.

Author Tom French was raised on an island in the St. Lawrence River. He teaches 7th grade English in Massena, New York and his writing has appeared in numerous publications as well as on North Country Public Radio. He has collected artifacts of the 1000 Islands for nearly twenty years along with his mother, Nellie Taylor. His book River Views – A History of the 1000 Islands in 3D will be published in May. 📖

Stereoscopic Association's August, 1980 convention in Canton, Ohio.

Jack Brown has been a significant source for my research, and he has provided me with copies of some articles from the 1870s from *The Brockville Recorder*.

Several of the McIntyre views are originally from the collection of Dan Grant and are now in the

No 53, "View of Steam Yacht at Nobby Island." This early McIntyre view on a yellow mount is in remarkable condition and reveals his skills at stereoscopic composition as well as the precise posing of large groups. Unusual for a McIntyre back label, this one has a typeset title and number. (The same number is scratched into the negative at lower right.)

