The entrance of Canadian women in the professional art world grew during the first half of the twentieth century, as it became more acceptable for women to become professional artists than had been the case around the turn of the century. Mount Allison University first established an art program at the inception of the Ladies’ College in 1854, and it has continued into the present day enduring the closure of the Ladies’ College in 1937. Although art was valued as an appropriate subject for the refinement of women in the early part of the 20th century, it was not seen as either a valid academic field of study, or a means for pursuing professional work at that time. However, as ‘fine art’ proceeded to gain respectability and recognition as a valid academic subject and the focus of a respectable career, men and women began pursuing art as a career more frequently. Mount Allison’s approach to art education for women progressed alongside national changes by gradually focusing more attention on education in Fine Arts as a means of providing education to women on the premise that those enrolled in the program would potentially pursue careers as professional artists. By examining the case of Elizabeth McLeod, one of the most influential female artists women in the history of the Fine Arts department at Mount Allison University, we are able to view more closely the impact of the professionalization of art in one woman’s career at Mount Allison University.

Women who pursued art in Canada up until the late 19th century did so because it was a mark of social and cultural status. Yet women were not expected to pursue art professionally as a career. Most of the women who engaged in art were of upper-class backgrounds, hence, much of our understanding of Canada “is seen through the eyes of gifted young women artists who, as

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1 Art at Mount Allison -- ... a history, Sackville Art Association and Mount Allison University, 1977.
wives and homemakers, did watercolours and paintings in their ‘spare’ time.” As the nineteenth century ended, public attitudes towards women in higher education and the professions began to change. They began to be accepted into high-end art schools to be educated alongside men, and the idea of professional women artists was planted. At the same time, those who were interested in the arts found employment most often as teachers, thus an increasingly feminized occupation introduced women as professionals into the art world. Yet they continued to struggle in the professional art realm, finding it difficult to financially support themselves purely as ‘artists’ as well as gain “public recognition” for their art.

At Mount Allison University, a gradual transition occurred in the educational goals of the Fine Arts department in the Ladies’ College. During the first half of the 1900s, the university moved from teaching art as merely social and cultural marks of sophistication for women, or ‘ornamental’ education, to a more rigorous academic approach that eventually focused on preparing students for professional careers. In the mid 1800s, John Warren Gray, the first Fine Arts professor at Mount Allison understood art to be “a mark of culture, a part of one’s overall social deportment.” This concept established the approach that Mount Allison would take in educating women in Fine Arts; it would be a tool for refinement for many years to come. While the Mount Allison Ladies’ College offered women education in all traditional academic fields, the ‘Ornamental Branches’ of education, including art and music, were of utmost importance to female education. Yet these Ornamental Branches, including Music and Fine Arts, were not intended to replace other sorts of learning, but rather to compliment more ‘academic’ fields of

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2 Ibid.
3 Maria Tippett, By A Lady: Celebrating Three Centuries of Art by Canadian Women (Toronto: Penguin Group, 1992), 28.
4 Prentice et. al., Canadian Women: A History, 139.
5 Ibid, 140.
In essence, these branches were intended to train women into appropriate gender roles within their social and cultural spheres. Female students from privileged classes reflected their social status through such roles by not seeking employment or professional careers. “There was no question of [a woman] being allowed to work for her living for it was expected that she would be supported by a husband, father, or brother.” Explicitly stated in the Ladies’ College academic calendars of the years 1905 to 1920,

the object of all officers of [the Ladies’ College] is to impart an education which has regard not merely to accomplishments, but also to the molding of character and the acquirement of self-control – an education which shall prepare the daughter, the sister, the mother to exert a moral influence, the stronger always for being associated with intellectual vigor.

The educated woman, then, was understood to be a benefit to society, for as a daughter, a sister, or a mother, she could exert a positive influence on her family and social circle because of her education.

For some time, teaching was often the primary profession that women trained in art could pursue. Teaching was a respectable job for women, and at the turn of the century, women were increasingly entering the teaching field. Although Mount Allison may not have actively been training women to be professionals, women’s gradual integration with certain art-affiliated professions such as teaching, helped the overall progression of the professionalization of women as artists. As Maria Tippett states in By A Lady, an evaluation of three centuries of Canadian Women artists, “by the early 1900s Canadian women were more active and more visible than ever before as promoters, educators and producers of art.” Mount Allison visibly supported the

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7 Calendar of the Mount Allison Ladies’ College. (Sackville, New Brunswick: Mount Allison University, 1905-1920).
8 Prentice et. al., Canadian Women: A History, 77.
9 Calendar or the Mount Allison Ladies’ College. 1905-1920.
10 Prentice et. al., Canadian Women: A History, 135.
11 Ibid., 143.
12 Tippett, 38.
concept of women as teachers, as many were employed over the years. In addition, the university was officially proud of the work that their female graduates undertook in “public and private schools and vocational schools.”\textsuperscript{13} However, while some women sought employment in the field of art, the vast majority did not. Primarily, women excelled as students, not as teachers or professional artists.\textsuperscript{14}

A common public perception that women art students were not serious about producing art may have hindered their pursuit of employment as artists. Viewing art education as a means of social refinement served to create the impression that the women educated in art were not intended to pursue careers. In general, such presuppositions shaped notions that women being educated in art were not usually interested or passionate about producing art.\textsuperscript{15} Indeed, lack of female success in the art world has often been attributed to women’s choice of marriage and motherhood over pursuit of art as a profession.\textsuperscript{16} This may, in part, explain the short teaching terms of the women in Fine Arts at Mount Allison. Since female teachers in the early part of the twentieth century were expected to give up their teaching positions upon marriage, they were largely single women and this led to very short teaching careers\textsuperscript{17} as: “women were expected to work at jobs for only a few years before marriage.”\textsuperscript{18} Mount Allison was no exception, as female students who became teachers immediately after graduation often stayed only for short periods. Gender ideologies of marriage and motherhood placed serious restrictions on women’s careers and entrance into professions at this time.

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\textsuperscript{13} Calendar of the Mount Allison Ladies’ College, (Sackville, New Brunswick: Mount Allison University, 1918-1919), 29.
\textsuperscript{14} Tippett, 28.
\textsuperscript{15} Frances Borzello, \textit{A World of Our Own: Women as Artists} (United Kingdom: Thames and Hudson, 2000), 170.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 171.
\textsuperscript{18} Prentice et. al., \textit{Canadian Women: A History}, 250.
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Perhaps it is no surprise that Elizabeth McLeod, on the other hand, remained unmarried and childless throughout her time at Mount Allison. Canadian women were constantly reminded that motherhood was their most important role in life, and subsequently, most women did marry and have children. However, if McLeod had married, her strong ties to Mount Allison as an artist and teacher may have been weakened for her primary focus would have likely been her family obligations instead of on her career. Yet by remaining single, she was more closely enabled to pursue art professionally. McLeod’s status as a single female professional aptly reflects Canadian trends around increases in female professionals. Women who sought professional careers of various sorts often avoided marriage and motherhood in order to pursue careers, and seek “personal and economic autonomy.”

Until well into the 20th century, Mount Allison had only had two teachers in the Fine Arts department who held the distinctive title ‘professor,’ both of whom were male. Professor John Warren Gray was the first professor of the Fine Arts department appointed in 1869 and was employed until 1873. As “an artist of considerable and growing stature,” he boosted the status of the Fine Arts program by focusing not only on technique, but also on philosophy of art. After his position was terminated in 1873 due to financial constraints, numerous female teachers served the Fine Arts program at Mount Allison, but none were qualified to be called ‘professor’ due to the lack of training and experience they had received. Up until John Hammond arrived at Mount Allison in 1892, numerous women taught art, each serving anywhere from one to five-

19 Ibid.
20 Ibid., 175.
21 Elizabeth Smyth, et. al., Challenging Professions: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives on Women’s Professional Work (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 12.
22 Reid, Mount Allison University: A History I: 1843-1914, 112.
23 Ibid., 112-113.
24 Ibid., 113.
25 Virgil Hammock, “Art at Mount Allison,” Arts Atlantic I no. 3 (Summer/Fall 1978): 17.
year terms. It was generally accepted that male professionals that “ran the art schools, had most power of patronage, were the most respected critics, [and] chaired the trustees of the local museum.”

Hammond had a well-established reputation as a Canadian artist upon beginning his term at Mount Allison. Under his tenure, the Fine Arts program became more professionalized and increased the department’s stature within the university. His employment at Mount Allison offered prosperity to the department. His influence around the turn of the century as an artist was significant, and his success as an artist was continually acknowledged by the student population and the university community in publications such as the Academic Calendar for the Ladies’ College, as well as the Allisonia. However, he did have many female teachers working alongside him who would have also made strong contributions to the Fine Arts program during his time at Mount Allison. McLeod was one of these women. She, along with others, including Frances Fredericka Harris, Christian McKiel, and Nellie Ford Turner, began to take a more active role in the direction of the Fine Arts program. Although they had had minimal training in art instruction, (including McLeod, who became a teacher while still a student under Hammond in 1895), their teaching contributions to the Fine Arts department were essential for its very continuation.

McLeod was particularly exceptional as a female art teacher. She was born in Point de Bute, New Brunswick, the daughter of Robert Trueman McLeod who had attended at the

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27 Borzello, 170.
28 Eyland, 13.
30 Eyland, 14.
Wesleyan Academy in the 1860s.\textsuperscript{31} While her formal education in art only lasted from 1893 until 1896, she taught at Mount Allison up until 1947, taking brief periods of leave to study abroad.\textsuperscript{32} McLeod provides an important case study of professional female artists as her teaching term at Mount Allison is clearly far more significant than many of the teachers who taught only briefly, and often for only short periods after graduating. In terms of reputation, McLeod received high admiration from many of her students and was later acknowledged as “an enthusiastic and gifted art teacher.”\textsuperscript{33} McLeod, becoming the first female head of the Fine Arts department at Mount Allison in 1930, was also the first head of a Fine Arts department in all of Canada.\textsuperscript{34} However, there had been a degree of initial hesitation at Mount Allison to recognize McLeod as head of the department. While she acted in this capacity from 1916 – 1935, her headship was only officially recognized from 1930 – 1935. Perhaps this suggests some resistance to idea of having a woman occupy such an important professional position in spite of the potential for advancing the status of women in the art community.\textsuperscript{35}

By the early 1900s gendered expectations of women as professional artists were changing. The presence of women in post-secondary education was increasing in Canada, clearly illustrating that “women were capable of advanced learning and taking on the professional work that such learning could lead to.”\textsuperscript{36} In the art world specifically, women found themselves as significant contributors in the education of art, as teachers, as students, providing art for exhibitions, in art associations, and as cultural organizers.\textsuperscript{37} By World War II, Canadian women

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Ibid.
\item \textit{Art at Mount Allison}.
\item \textit{Art at Mount Allison}.
\item Evans, 15.
\item Prentice, 175.
\item Tippett, 68.
\end{enumerate}
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were being trained as professional artists, 38 not only at Mount Allison, which granted the first Bachelor of Fine Arts in Canada in 1941, 39 but all over the country.

John Hammond’s arrival at the Mount Allison in 1892 strongly contributed to the shift in the Fine Arts program from providing social training to young women, (as was the case under Mr. Gray), to professional training for university students. 40 Furthermore, Hammond’s arrival at Mount Allison coincided with major theoretical approaches to educating women in Fine Arts. John Reid explains that by the 1880s the Ladies’ College was struggling to accommodate demand for teachers of the Ornamental Branches while trying to uphold its reputation for being a school of “high intellectual standards.” 41 Subsequently, the Music and Fine Arts programs changed their focus from being purely ornamental to upholding higher artistic standards, which in turn would raise the status of the entire Ladies’ College. 42 To support this aim, Mount Allison introduced the four-year diploma program in 1877, “which provided for the first time a coherent and graduated programme of art study.” 43 Additionally, Hammond’s appointment as a professor at Mount Allison helped secure Mount Allison’s status as an important centre for Fine Arts in the Maritimes and within Canada. 44

The transition from an ornamental focus on art to a more sophisticated professionalized focus on art was not an isolated case for Mount Allison. In fact, “the changing social expectations regarding women and their education no doubt assisted the smooth transition of the curriculum from a semi-ornamental programme to one dedicated to a more serious, professional

38 Hammock, 23.
40 Evans, 14.
41 Reid, Mount Allison University: A History I: 1843-1914, 173.
42 Ibid.
43 Ibid., 174.
44 Ibid., 210.
presentation of art education." Officially, Mount Allison supported this approach to art education for it was recommended in 1934 that its female students women prepare to be employed alongside men and that art should therefore shift from a cultural and social approach to a more practical vocational type of study. Consequently, Mount Allison took steps to ensure this transition by establishing a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree program in 1941, and including Fine Arts in university curriculum, rather than only within the Ladies’ College (which eventually closed in 1937). Hence, “by the 1940s, Mount Allison had become a professional art school.”

McLeod held an important role in the professionalization of the Fine Arts department at Mount Allison. Not only was she a prominent art educator, but her experience was also representative of other female artists at that time. Women art teachers were typically firmly committed to their positions, and as such McLeod’s life was centered largely on the Mount Allison community. Her students noted her deep dedication. She made “untiring efforts […] in this department” and her appreciation for art was said to be inspiring for her students. Shortly after World War II, McLeod’s efforts were rewarded as she became the third faculty member to become a professor emerita, and was also awarded a Doctor of Laws degree in 1954 as part of the Centennial celebration of the education of women at Mount Allison. Because 1954 marked the one hundredth anniversary of the opening of the Women’s Academy at Mount Allison it was a fitting honor for McLeod on this occasion. At a time when women did not typically stay in teaching positions for longer than just a few years, it is quite remarkable that

45 Evans, 13.
46 Ibid., 21.
47 Eyland, 18.
48 Frame.
49 Art at Mount Allison.
52 Art at Mount Allison.
McLeod remained a lively and active participant in the education of Fine Arts at Mount Allison for fifty-two years.

McLeod was not only an educator, but an accomplished painter as well. Most of her work focused on still lifes, flowers in particular, and also landscapes.\textsuperscript{53} Her long tenure at Mount Allison was frequently interrupted by trips abroad to New York to study at the Students’ Art League\textsuperscript{54} or studying art in European museums.\textsuperscript{55} Clearly, she took her own profession seriously as she sought continuous development of her artistic skill and achieved recognition within her field. Indeed, much of her work was shown in exhibitions across Canada and the United States at places like the Canadian Royal Academy, the Canadian Art Association, and the Maritime Art Association.\textsuperscript{56} For example, one of her paintings in 1943 was given special mention in an exhibition in New Jersey, and was acknowledged in the reports of the Sackville Art Association.\textsuperscript{57} As she continued to produce her own work in addition to teaching, and “received national exposure,”\textsuperscript{58} McLeod became a highly regarded professional artist at Mount Allison and abroad.

In the wider Sackville community and in the Maritime provinces, McLeod’s stature as a professional is also indicated by the important role she played in affiliated art associations. One such organization was the Sackville Art Association (SAA), formed in 1935, as one of the branches of the Maritime Art Association (MAA). Evidently, McLeod had been involved in initial efforts of the MAA, where she and others were “enthusiastic and began to make plans for a Sackville Art Association.”\textsuperscript{59} Subsequently, McLeod served as one of the Sackville delegates

\textsuperscript{53} Eyland, 15.
\textsuperscript{54} “Death Notice,” \textit{Mount Allison Record} 47 no. 1 (Winter 1964), 25.
\textsuperscript{55} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{56} Mary W Hashey, \textit{Maritime Artists 1} (Maritime Arts Association, 1967), 57.
\textsuperscript{57} \textit{A Backward Glance 50th Anniversary 1935-1985} (Sackville Art Association, 1985), 10.
\textsuperscript{58} Eyland, 15.
\textsuperscript{59} \textit{A Backward Glance 50th Anniversary 1935-1985}, 1.
with the MAA for a number of terms, and sat on the executive committee for the SAA, holding positions of president and vice-president.⁶⁰

A professional artist and educator of the early 20th century, McLeod made an unprecedented contribution to the Mount Allison Fine Arts department as well as to the art community in Sackville. At a time when it was difficult for Canadian women to undertake professional careers due to societal, cultural, and familial constraints, McLeod’s status as a simple woman largely enabled her to establish a career as a professional artist and teacher. She achieved significance as the first female head of a Fine Arts department in Canada, as well as presiding within an institution that provided the first Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in Canada, marking Mount Allison’s art program as perhaps the most progressive within Canada. In this context, Elizabeth McLeod holds a valuable place in the history of Mount Allison University.

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