

## HARRY PALMER FONDS

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### **Background:**

Harry Palmer (1930 - ) was born and raised in Calgary, but attended university in British Columbia in engineering, graduating in the early 1950s. He worked for several different firms in Calgary during the 1950s but in the 1960s joined his father in a family-owned farm implements manufacturing business. When this became uneconomic in the late 1960s he was employed by several petroleum corporations, and moved to Toronto in the early 1970s. While there he began to photograph, taking courses and workshops to improve his abilities. By the early 1980s he left his last employer and began photographing full time on a variety of self-assignments. His latest interests are more oriented to the use of the computer as an intermediary in the development of art.

### **Fonds contents -- General:**

The majority of the documents in the Harry Palmer *fonds* consists of photographs. Most of these are black and white negatives and contact prints; colour material is, almost exclusively, colour transparencies, both 2 1/4 in. and 35mm sizes. Only a handful of prints in the accession have been printed as "fine prints"; previous accessions by the National Archives of work by Mr. Palmer have consisted exclusively of prints.

The donation consists of the following:

5 x 7 b&w negatives	1391
2 1/4 b&w negatives	6929
35 mm b&w negatives	412
5 x 7 colour transparencies	664
2 1/4 colour transparencies	1863
35mm colour transparencies	35
2 x 4 in colour transparencies	6
8 x 10 colour transparencies	10
8 x 10 colour negatives	16
35mm colour negatives	335
B&W proof sheets (contacts)	1152
Colour proof sheets (contacts)	16
Albums of silver prints	51

TOTAL 12,280 photographic items

[Note: most if not all of the black and white negatives are also available as positives on contact sheets; none of the colour material, other than the 16 8 x 10 colour negatives, is available as prints.]

### Manuscript materials:

A variety of manuscript materials, relating directly to the photography, was also donated. This includes model releases from many of those having sat for formal portraits (as in the Companions, Calgary People and Places, and Veterans series); permissions and requests for aid in his photography; mock-ups for Sentinels and Je Me Souviens books; catalogues of his work; correspondence and other material relating to all of his photographic projects.

Mr. Palmer interests are focussed primarily on people as individuals and, by extension, on the places in which they live. "The places in which they live" includes both the exterior built environment of city or town, as well as the interiors of the homes and workplaces where they live and work. Beyond this, however, he has clearly chosen Canada and Canadians as the subject of his work: his interest is in those Canadians who have achieved recognition because of achievement in their chosen fields; his interest is in Canadian veterans who fought in various wars during the 20th century, as well as in the memorialization of their actions; his interest is in the people of small rural prairie communities; his interest is in his own community, its people and places.

### Portfolios/Assignments:

Virtually all of the photographs in this *fonds* were taken for one or another of the following self-assignments, and these were often developed over a period of several years (the actual time frames for each can be determined from the negative numbers found in each assignment).

The assignments include:

Canadian Arctic (done while still an employee of Dome Petroleum, but based on the several years experience he had had in the Arctic);

Calgary Places and People (which resulted in the book of the same name);

Inglewood and Ramsey, Calgary (an extension, in the 1990s, of his earlier work on Calgary, dealing with two of the older districts in the city);

Companions of the Order of Canada (done over the period 1984-1991, resulting in the publication *125 Companions of the Order of Canada*, selected from portrait sittings done with 139 Companions of the Order of Canada)

"Je Me Souviens" (an essay on the people of Quebec City, in their own words);

Sentinels of the Prairies (including grain elevators, small town Alberta, and the people of these towns);

Canadian War Cemeteries and Memorials (including those in France, Belgium and the Netherlands, and in Canada);

Canadian War Veterans (portraits)

### Importance of Accession:

It is difficult to overstate the value of this accession to the National Archives of Canada. (1) The quality of the photography and the large format of the photographs provides documentation which is simply not otherwise available. The photographs are almost always identified. (2) The subject matter includes both material of national interest (such as the series on war memorials and on the Companions of the Order of Canada) as well as regional material (small prairie communities and their residents) which is very poorly represented in our collections, particularly

for the post-war period. (3) The photographs document some areas of prairie life, such as grain elevators, which are quickly passing. Indeed, one short series documents the destruction of such an elevator. (4) The photographs are easily accessible and useable: copyright has been assigned to the National Archives, and Mr. Palmer had the foresight to obtain model releases for most of his portraits. (5) Manuscript documentation is often available about the individuals photographed, or about particular photographic projects. This is very unusual.

**Physical Condition:**

The contact prints are filed either in boxes or in binders, according to general subject/assignment. With a very few exceptions all negatives have been filed in plastic sleeves of a type which is used by the National Archives for its permanent storage. The manuscript material is in both binders and in file folders.

**Identification:**

All prints and negatives were given negative numbers which integrally include the date on which the photograph was taken. In general, some location or other identification is available either on the negatives on the reverse of the contact prints. All 4000+ images of the "Companions" series are identified by name of the portrait sitter, as are those of the Veteran's series. The 5 x 7 negatives are identified on the sleeves. The series "Je Me Souviens" was intended to be a publication but was not published; the text for this project forms part of the *fonds*. Further published information about 707 images from his various projects is available on-line at <http://www.harrypalmergallery.ab.ca> as well as in *Calgary Places and People* and *125 Companions of the Order of Canada*. A detailed computerized database finding aid is in the course of construction in order to allow easy access by subject, name, negative number, or location.

**Arrangement:**

For the purposes of the NAA Board the photographs and related materials have been organized according to the general subject of the project in question. [National Archives practice is to separate colour materials for frozen storage, which would in some instances render consideration of particular projects somewhat more difficult.] A short description of the nature of the material in each container is included in the container.

**Publications:**

The series on Calgary was published as *Calgary Places and People* in 1983; the series on Companions of the Order of Canada was published as *125 Companions of the Order of Canada* in 1992.

**Copyright:**

Copyright in all the work has been assigned to the National Archives of Canada. It should be kept in mind that Mr. Palmer produced print editions for public sale from some of

these negatives, and that the donation prevents him from continuing such production.

**Attachments:**

Curriculum vita for Mr. Palmer

List of Companions of the Order of Canada photographed by Mr. Palmer.

Andrew Rodger

Archivist

Visual and Sound Archives Division

(996-7781)

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Calgary and Inglewood (a district of Calgary), including work for *Calgary, Place and People*.

Manuscript materials:

Found in binders, and includes biographical information about individuals portrayed in the *Calgary* book, as well as permissions and model releases.

Photographic material:

Mr. Palmer's interest in Calgary and Inglewood as photographic subjects covers the 1980s and extends into the early 1990s. Much of the photography for the early part of the period can be found in the 5 x 7 b&w negatives, either in binders in this box, or in the five file drawers of black and white negatives.

## Companions of the Order of Canada 1984-1992

### Manuscript Material:

File folder: Concerned with the production of the book *125 Companions of the Order of Canada*, and with the exhibition of the same name.

Material in binders: Includes biographical information about some of the Companions, and model releases.

### Photographic Material:

There are a total 4046 b&w 2 1/4 in sq negatives in this series; proof sheets are available for all the photographs. An average of about 20 negatives was made of each Companion. Images were usually made at the Companion's home, and reflect the individual's interests -- and in some cases the contributions which the person made to merit the recognition given by the Companionship. There is often a complicity evident between the photographer and the subject, leading to some excellent portraiture. (Mr. Palmer said that Yousuf Karsh decided the different angles from which his portraits were to be made; there are a fewer-than-average number of photographs for the Karsh assignment!)

The negatives are organized by date of taking (1984-1992). Both negative and proof sheets are identified with the sitter's name and the date the photographs were taken.

“Je Me Souviens” 1992

Manuscript materials:

Found in binders: Mock-up of proposed book (*A Calgarian In Quebec Remembers*); permissions; biographical information; releases; meanings of “Je Me Souviens” to portrait sitters.

File: Information about attempts to get funding and support for publication.

Photographic materials:

This series is unique in that it is exclusively shot in colour (as transparencies). It is also unusual in that Mr. Palmer photographed a number of Quebec City residents of non-French descent, as well as Francophones.

The series consists of 709 2 1/4 in sq colour transparencies; these are primarily portraits of individuals, taken both indoors and outdoors, as well as some views of Old Québec.

## Canadian War Veterans Mid-1980s - Mid-1990s

### Manuscript materials:

Files: Europe: May-June 1989 -- concerned with Mr. Palmer's itinerary through Europe, permissions, letters of access, etc.

Heroes & Monuments -- pamphlets concerning battlegrounds, monuments, etc.; funding and exhibition proposals.

Binders: biographical data about some veterans; releases.

"Canadian War Veterans and Their Memorials" -- A catalogue of selected images from the work that Harry Palmer took over a period of years.

### Photographic materials:

This material includes an on-going interest of Mr. Palmer in the remembering of those Canadians who fought for the country, and is reflected in several distinct assignments:

1. Veterans: portraits of veterans of different wars, covered in 861 2 1/4 in sq colour transparencies, 238 b&w 2 1/4 in sq negatives, and approximately 200 b&w and colour 35 mm negatives.
2. Overlapping with this is material concerned with Remembrance Day, cenotaphs and war memorials across Canada (220 5 x 7 colour transparencies and 41 2 1/4 in sq colour transparencies), and a series of 128 colour negatives on the Freedom of the City given to the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry in Calgary.
3. As well, there is material on Canadian war memorials in Europe (primarily France, Belgium and the Netherlands), including an extensive series on the Vimy Memorial at Vimy Ridge ("Canada's Day 9 April" on one of the albums refers to the battle of Vimy Ridge in 1917). This material consists of 270 5 x 7 in colour transparencies and 12 2 1/4 in sq colour transparencies.

Arctic -- 1981-1982

Manuscript materials:

Included in this box are three small binders which Mr. Palmer kept when doing some of his photography: these indicate the conditions under which particular images were taken and are, I believe, unique in our collections.

Binders: Some biographical information, releases and correspondence is found in the binders.

Photographic materials:

The photographs include 1426 2 1/4 in sq black and white negatives, and proof sheets for the images. The images include both portraits of individuals in the north (Inuvik, Tuktoyaktuk, drilling rigs in the Arctic Ocean, etc.) and of oil company activities, personnel and equipment. This work was done when Mr. Palmer was still employed as an environmental officer by Dome Petroleum.

Sentinels of the Prairies -- 1980s

Manuscript materials:

File: Permissions, correspondence re exhibitions, funding.

Binders: Releases

Photographic materials:

Subjects: Grain elevators, small towns (mainly in Alberta but also including other provinces), inhabitants of small towns posed in their surroundings (work, home), general vistas.

The majority of the black and white negatives are also available as approximately 400 contact sheets. The series includes 120 4 x 5 b & w negatives; approximately 200 5 x 7 colour transparencies; approximately 200 2 1/4 colour transparencies; 860 2 1/4 b&w negatives; and a small selection of other material.

Of interest is a box of 16 8 x 10 colour negatives and proof prints; these include include several shots of the destruction of a grain elevator. There are also 10 8 x 10 colour transparencies, primarily of Toronto buildings in 1987. This box includes the only 8 x 10 work in the collection.