

AUGUSTUS F. KENDERDINE, 1870 - 1947

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AUGUSTUS F. KENDERDINE had an established reputation as an artist when he came to Canada in 1908. He was born near Blackpool, Lancashire, England, in 1870, and when fourteen he was apprenticed to an art dealer. He received his first lessons in painting from his godfather, Chevalier Lafosse, a Belgian artist who had settled in Manchester. Later, at the insistence of his godfather, he studied art at l'Académie Julien in Paris. On his return to England the young painter opened an art shop and studio at Blackpool and became known as a portraitist as well as a painter of landscapes. He exhibited at the Royal Academy, London, and the Paris Salon, and his paintings were acquired by several British galleries.



Photo by E. Davis, Prince Albert

Gus Kenderdine at Emma Lake

In 1908 he decided to emigrate. He considered going to Japan where he had relatives in the ship business but chose instead to settle on a homestead in Western Canada. In his youth he had been a trooper and an instructor in equitation in a British cavalry regiment; he loved horses and longed for a ranch of his own. He found a homestead that he liked near Lashburn, selecting the land, his daughter says, on the basis of its natural beauty and not the quality of the soil. He moved there with his wife and four children in August, 1909, and built a house at the crest of a high hill which he whimsically named "Pike's Peak." During the next ten years he was busy clearing land, breaking sod, riding range and herding cattle but he did not give up the idea of painting as a means of livelihood. He had a son who would take over the ranch eventually.

In 1920 this homesteader from Pike's Peak showed some of his paintings in Saskatoon and he found an appreciative audience. He was advised to move to Saskatoon and he did so in 1922. He accepted the University's offer of space for a studio in the new Physics Building, taught the first of his University night classes in 1926-27, and in 1933-34 the first of the courses in Art History that he gave in association with Professor R. A. Wilson of the Department of English.

During the summer 'Gus' Kenderdine went on painting, sketching and camping trips, travelling west to the mountains and the sea in the 1920's, north to the lakes and wooded country in Saskatchewan in the 1930's. In 1935 he and Dr. Wilson proposed a summer art school at Emma Lake where students could sketch outdoors and paint in surroundings that were free from the dreariness of the dust-laden prairies. The University was willing to open an art camp if the plans were made on a simple scale. Land was



Courtesy Norman MacKenzie Art Gallery, Regina

Kenderdine's 1923 North Saskatchewan River, oil on 29½" x 39¾" canvas

leased, a site was cleared, a few small buildings were erected, and the camp was opened in 1936. Expenses were kept within the narrow limits of the University budget and to the delight of all concerned the camp was an unqualified success from the beginning. Gus Kenderdine returned to teach there each summer until his death in 1947.

In 1936 he was appointed the Director and Professor of Art at the newly established School of Art at Regina College. His classes became larger than ever but in his free time during the eleven years he spent at Regina College he was able to sketch and paint scenes in the beautiful Qu'Appelle Valley.

Although his early paintings show the influence of the nineteenth century academicians under whom he studied, Gus Kenderdine's later work was done in a freer style. In Canada he found subjects so varied that they required different techniques. In one of his public addresses he drew attention to problems in composition which must be

solved when contrasting the broad sweep of the prairies with the vastness of the sky; in another he stressed the importance of capturing the quality of the light, for the light in wooded areas, he noted, is different from the light on the prairies.

He was a kindly man, unselfish and tolerant, a witty companion who had a quiet way of enlivening social gatherings. He had a deep feeling for Saskatchewan and would be pleased with the tribute paid him in the memorial which has been placed on the site of his homestead. The plaque on this memorial reads:

He was the foremost interpreter of Saskatchewan scenery, from the open prairies to the northern lakes and forests; and he was also a painter of portraits. Gus Kenderdine had no rival in capturing the spirit, majesty and power of the Western Canadian scene. His pictures are his bequest and our heritage. For he left a record on canvas of scenes that have now vanished forever.