

How Shall I Frame Myself?

by Liberty Walton

An investigation into the Act of Self-Representation in Front of the Camera

Charlotte Kathleen O'Reilly (1867-1945) of Victoria, British Columbia, was the most beloved daughter of Peter and Caroline O'Reilly. She held her home and family closer to her heart than any of her many social affairs. Embracing her British roots, she accepted the traditions imposed upon her by her family, yet exemplified the lifestyle patterns and choices of a first-generation Canadian. Kathleen was not only photographed in several international professional studios, but also by her brother, the amateur photographer in the family. He used a Kodak camera that is still in the collection at Point Ellice House Historic site. Although Kathleen visited England several times and travelled internationally, she never abandoned Point Ellice and her home. To examine Kathleen O'Reilly's self-representation in front of the camera, it is the sizable collection of archival photographs in the O'Reilly collection at Point Ellice House and the BC Archives that are deconstructed in this paper to reveal her personal choices, influences, and values.

Home to the pioneer Victoria family of British heritage, Point Ellice House contains a wealth of two-dimensional documentary sources. Much of this material relates specifically to the life of Kathleen O'Reilly: prints and paintings, photographs, both unmounted and in frames; some diaries, letters, notebooks; accounts and bills; invitations, calling cards, programs for dances, regattas, and concerts; books of various kinds. This collection covers Kathleen's lifespan from 1867 to 1945. Point Ellice existed as a place for social gathering and as the home of Peter and Caroline O'Reilly with their four children. Peter O'Reilly immigrated to Canada from Ireland, and arrived in Victoria, where he was given his first appointment from Governor James Douglas. In the early 1860s, Caroline Trutch moved from England to Victoria, where she met Peter and married him in 1863. Eighteen hundred and sixty-seven was a momentous year for the O'Reilly family, including the birth of their second child, Kathleen O'Reilly, and the move into Point Ellice House.

There are over fifty photographs of Kathleen O'Reilly. They are in the collections of the BC Archives and Point Ellice House Historic site. Nearly 30 of those were taken in a studio, while the others were taken by an amateur photographer and can be considered snapshots. In this paper, the studio photographs and five of the amateur photographs will be analyzed in chronological order and used to discuss how Kathleen chose to use photography as a form of personal expression.

The photograph became the universal language of information about 150 years ago with the initial development of photography. Since then, photographic images and changing technology have been seriously examined under the academic eye. The art-historical analysis of discussing subject matter, stylistic trends, provenance of the image, and role of the photographer can be applied to the entire collection of Kathleen O'Reilly's studio images. This analysis will illustrate photography's important role within the humanities and the study of womanly arts. The study of domestic imagery, as well as the Victorian use of romanticism within social history, is appropriate to this investigation.

Studio photographs are especially informative pieces of documentary evidence. On the mounted photographs, the name of the photographer, often with the address, helps to establish the date of the image. With the invention of the camera in 1839 came the development of the profession of the studio photographer, with its complexity of tripods, black cloths, glass plate negatives, special backdrops, darkrooms and a cocktail of chemicals. In the studio photograph, however, is presented an image created by both the studio photographer and the subject. In the Kathleen O'Reilly images, one can trace her growing self-expression from childhood to adulthood, in her choice of dress, posture, and props. Each of the background props, personal ornaments, facial expression, and body posture places Kathleen in a romanticized environment, showing the influence of a British, Victorian culture.

Around the year 1870, Kathleen is presented for the first time in front of the camera. Even at a very young age, Kathleen is shown in her Sunday

¹Terry Reksten, *More English than the English* (Victoria BC: Orca Book Publishing, 1986), 71

best at an unknown, yet professional studio, likely in the Victoria area. Typical even today, this baby portrait, HP 50070, is an example of parental concerns and values for the appearance of their daughter. This image sets the stage for the role photography was to play in Kathleen's life, and exemplifies the value her parents placed on the act of photographing their daughter. With a lace shawl tied at the neck, over a dress adorned with rosebuds, her face is framed with perfectly sweet curls, the epitome of innocence. Her innocence was to become an underlining thread in all of her studio portraits.

Children were a rarity in Victoria during the year 1867, as this was only a decade since the fur traders' outpost expanded to become a town supplying miners heading to the Cariboo gold rush. In 1865, the population dropped from 8,000 to 3,500.¹ This decline in population and business meant the colony of Vancouver Island could no longer survive on its own and was annexed with the mainland, in an Act passed by Queen Victoria in the year 1866. This Act, which had significant impact on the development of Victoria, was passed only a year before Kathleen was born.

In 1871, four years after Kathleen's birth, the English colony of British Columbia entered the four-year-old Dominion of Canada and Victoria was officially designated status as the capital of British Columbia. As Kathleen grew, so did the city. While the political unification of this British territory in continental North America led to stable prospects in the city, Kathleen left her toddler years and entered her childhood. Victoria, more than any other place in the Canadian west, embodied the English and Victorian ideals of class structure and proper behaviour.² Kathleen in all of her innocence and youth mirrored these ideals and reflected the city's growth.

At age ten, in 1877, Kathleen is presented again

in her best, a dress with similarly jagged detailing at the collar and cuffs. The style of her dress is Victorian, emphasized with a double band at the bottom of the skirt. Taken at the studio of Stephen Allen Spencer, this photograph, HP 23057, is evidence that the O'Reilly family saw several advantages to commissioning professional portraits of Kathleen. The act of preserving an image of their daughter, and by utilizing a professional studio, was a sign of wealth. Not all people in Victoria

could afford the costs of photographing their children, especially on such a regular basis. By exploiting their wealth in such a fashion, Caroline O'Reilly would have seen photography an opportunity to secure their position within the upper classes. Portraits were sent back to family and friends in the homeland, constantly announcing the O'Reillys' financial success and the growth of their family.

With the dedication "For dear Uncle Joe" written on the back of the photograph, this likely was a gift to Joseph Trutch, Caroline's brother. Caroline would

have distributed copies of this image to family members in Victoria and the British Isles. Only a year after the death of Kathleen's sister, Mary Augusta, the O'Reilly family in Victoria would still be receiving condolences from family abroad. This image would have been sent to comfort distant relatives, as a sign of hope and survival during the harsh years of Kathleen's early life in Canada's wild west. Until the time of this photograph, a daughter of the Crease family personally tutored Kathleen. In 1878, at age eleven, she attended Angela College, an Anglican college on Burdett Street in Victoria. Combined with the death of her sister and start of formal studies, Kathleen would have received considerable attention at this time in her life as the only remaining daughter of the family. Even her wardrobe would have received extra attention.³



BC Archives HP-23057

Left: HP-23057. Kathleen O'Reilly, 1877. Studio portrait shows Kathleen as a young girl, age ten, sitting on a chair, hands folded and resting on chair arm. Studio of S.A. Spencer, Victoria.

² Rosemary Neering, *Wild West Women: Travels, Adventures, and Rebels* (Vancouver: Whitecap Books, 2000), 97

³ Virginia Careless, *Responding to Fashion - The Clothing of the O'Reilly Family*, (Victoria: Royal British Columbia Museum, 1993) 7

Several O'Reilly family photographs were taken in the Fort Street studio of S.A. Spencer, one of the prominent Victoria area photographers that made a start in 1858 with the Cariboo gold rush boom and increased business operations. Ending his studio work in 1885, Spencer had advertised as a "daguerrian artist," a reflection upon British photographic traditions. Apart from this image, two of Kathleen's siblings, Mary Augusta and Arthur Jack, were photographed at the Spencer studio. All of the children were propped against a two-tiered stripped stool, used to steady them for the length of exposure. HP 50003 is a constructed image, using settings, props and practical costume for a formal pose and presentation. Below Kathleen's skirt, and to either side of her feet, is the thick base for an instrument used to support her position. This instrument would have been clamped to the back of her neck or at the back of her waist. Props, such as this stool, were used in the studio portraits of children, not by choice, but in order to keep the children from moving.

The development of studio photography also affected the changing role of women, as photography was now more accessible for the amateur. Women, who in Victorian times were not expected to have a profession or succeed at endeavours outside of the home, found in this new medium a way in which they could employ their creative talents.⁴ One of Victoria's nineteenth-century studio photographers was Hannah Maynard.

Hannah began to photograph residents of the Victoria area shortly after her arrival from eastern Canada. She was popularly known for photographing children, in a series of "little gems." These served as images for New Year's greetings between the years 1885 to 1899. Hannah is known for her non-traditional approach to photography, cutting out images of children and placing them onto new backgrounds. She also experimented with multiple exposures in composite images, reproducing herself in triplicate on one image. Hannah's vision was never truly embraced by the O'Reilly family, as only one known studio image by her exists in the O'Reilly photo collections: a cut-out of Arthur imposed onto an image of the Gorge waterfront.

Hannah's work has won her acclaimed status in the history of women's photography. But during the Victorian era, several contemporaries would have frowned upon her non-traditional approach and may have viewed her as an eccen-

tric. Other Victoria area photographers, such as S.A. Spencer, relied upon traditional approaches of presenting the subject to the camera, providing the client with a photograph rooted in British practices of photography.

The O'Reilly decision to remain a client of the S.A. Spencer studio is an example of the influence on Kathleen's perspective and her continued choice to embrace the traditions of her British past.

At age 15, in 1882, Caroline took Kathleen to London to enroll her in an appropriate finishing school. En route they visited San Francisco where these images of Kathleen and Caroline were photographed in the Taber studio. Kathleen returns to this studio in the future, showing her satisfaction with the results of the images.

At the Taber Studio, Kathleen is photographed in two different dresses against two different backdrops, both at one sitting. Both dresses are simplistic in line, with a high collar, while detailed at the collar and cuffs. Consisting of a heavier, practical fabric, the dresses could have been worn to formal affairs. In both images, Kathleen's thick, dark hair is smartly tied back with a bow, while a pendant hangs from her neck.

Also at this studio visit, Caroline is photographed against both backdrops, although she faces the opposite direction of her daughter. The line of her dress echoes the line of her daughter's dress, as do the severity of facial expressions. Caroline's dress is Victorian and slightly bustled in the back. The same simply beaded earrings and necklace, as well as the neat hairstyle underneath a tightly fitting hat, appear in both images.

Both images of mother and daughter are conservative, containing similar stylistic elements of hairstyle and dress. These similarities show Caroline's desire to present both herself and Kathleen in an orderly fashion. Even the choice of darker fabrics is an indication of Caroline's intervention, as she often chose darker fabrics for her dress. Such maternal choices made on her daughter's behalf would have been the greatest source of influence on Kathleen's life at this time.

These images are very orderly in nature, which is reflected not only by the maternal choice of clothing and tidy hairstyle but also by the photographer's choice of backdrop and props. When Caroline selected this studio, she would have investigated the quality of final images, the photographer's style, and perhaps the studio props. In one image, HP 50072, the photographer has selected

⁴ Cathy Converse, *Mainstays – Women Who Shaped BC* (Victoria: Horsdal & Shubert, 1998) 64



BC Archives HP-50072

Left: HP-50072.
Kathleen O'Reilly, 1882,
at age fifteen, Taber Studio,
San Francisco.

In London of 1883, the photograph studio of W. & D. Downey billed themselves as “Photographers by Special Appointment to Her Majesty the Queen.” This studio may have been personally selected by Kathleen, or as instructed by her family. “You must have your photo taken before long, not an expensive one until we see how we like it.”⁵ This choice of photographer ensured the subject would be presented in accordance with the upper-class social norms.

At the studio of W. & D. Downey, photographs taken of Kathleen present her in a bust portrait, as well as two three-quarter-length portraits. There is a remarkable difference between the image of a young girl taken one year earlier in San Francisco and the image of a young lady captured in these photographs taken at W.

a backdrop painting of an arch, while the backdrop in photograph HP-23055 is of an ornate pillar and low riser. Both backdrops are reminiscent of architectural types, used to create an institutional and orderly setting. In HP-23055 Kathleen leans against the pillar, an unwavering symbol of good order on a stable foundation, all of the same ideals Caroline invested in her daughter.

Two of Kathleen’s personal items are brought into these photographs, a basket and a pendant. While holding the backrest of a wooden chair, she is clutching a simple, woven basket. Of particular interest is the pendant, which appears in both photographs, possibly a personal item with sentimental attachment.

& D. Downey. These portraits are the first indication of Kathleen’s attention to current trends, following the fashions best suited for a young lady, leaving behind her childhood image. In short, they show Kathleen’s transition from a girl into adulthood.

From age fifteen until eighteen, Kathleen attended Lady Murray’s Finishing School in London. Here, she would have been educated on the most fashionable clothing and hairstyles for the time. In keeping with these fashions, this school instructed Kathleen to wear a corset, which shaped a feminine waist, complementing the cut of her dress. The action of wearing fashionable clothing to a studio sitting was similar to the social events Kathleen attended. Choice of clothing is influ-

⁵ Peter O’Reilly to Kathleen O’Reilly, Victoria, 11 November 1896. O’Reilly letters, BC Archives, p.2

Right: HP-50095
*Romantic imagery and
responding to fashion.*
Kathleen O'Reilly, age 16,
1883. W. & D. Downey,
Photographers by Special
Appointment to Her
Majesty the Queen,
London, England.

enced by the occasion at which it is worn and by the type of people with whom the wearer associates.⁶

Influenced by her mother, as well as by her peers, school, and society, the clothing in these images indicates that Kathleen's choice of a fashion is very closely linked to her personal considerations of social status, and her response to socially dictated standards.⁷

As seen in the bust portrait, HP 50077, she continues to neatly turn back her hair, always secured into place, adopting a hairstyle that is in keeping with current trends, as illustrated in *Lady's Pictorial* dated 21 February 1891.⁸ HP 50095 is also the first image of Kathleen in a hat, which is elaborately feathered. Although similar to the hat worn by Caroline in the Taber Studio photograph, it is likely this choice was a personal statement at-

tending contemporary fashion rather than an influence of maternal concerns. The parasol is indicative of another personal choice made by Kathleen, an elaborate and fashionable substitute for the simple woven basket selected a year earlier.

These images not only provide documentary evidence of Kathleen's life and her growing self-expression; as portraits they also display an artificial romanticism—a philosophy that encouraged certain viewpoints as a way of seeing. The backdrop selected by the photographer is a painted garden scene, while Kathleen, wearing a tea gown, stands holding an outdoor parasol. This photographer has presented Kathleen in the romantic, complementing not only her personal concerns, but also her outward appearance. Studio settings



BC Archives HP-50095

were most likely decided by the photographer, who would have crafted the pastoral scenes and staged interiors, such as these. These elements are somewhat reminiscent of the surroundings at Point Ellice and the dress she would have worn at home. In the studio photographs of Kathleen, she is portrayed in conventional images within a romantic environment. Kathleen has become subject to the construction of the image by the photographer. The romantic props and backdrops, combined with posture, facial expressions, and personal dress, concrete her role as a conventional young woman in Victorian society. Kathleen has embraced this romanticism in her own dress and adornment.

Romanticism is an alternative to realism. Romance is said to focus in dreams rather than real-

⁶ Careless, *Responding to Fashion*, 4

⁷ *Ibid.*, 26

⁸ Magazine from the Point Ellice House collection.

ity, its creators interested in the internal rather than the external lives of their subjects.⁹ Reminiscent of a garden scene, this romantic image reflects Kathleen's love of Point Ellice. Romance has human vision as its obsession: at its center is a person or persons viewing and viewed, an observer or spectator whose abilities to see fully, partially, or not at all indicate his or her moral as well as physical activities.¹⁰ More importantly than story to photograph, was the photograph to storytelling itself.

At age seventeen, in 1884, Kathleen visited the studio of Lambert, Weston and Son in Folkestone, England, for the first time. Five photographs are produced at this sitting, including three bust portraits and two standing three-quarter length portraits. As was the custom, Kathleen would have sent these images to friends and family members. Requesting multiple images from one sitting would have provided Kathleen with a selection from which to choose the best representation of herself. On a Saturday afternoon, 17 May 1884, she wrote in a letter to her brother Frank, indicating her pleasure with the photographs from this sitting. "My dear Frank, ... I am going to send out the photos that were taken down at Folkestone, of me. You will all think they are very flattering."¹¹

It is quite possible Kathleen selected this studio. Kathleen adds in her letter to Frank, "Weston's establishment has been very enlarged he has a very large window now, opposite the Bank, so a great many people stop to look. Lisa & I used to have fun watching them."¹²

In this series, Kathleen's hairstyle and dress are nearly identical to the fashions adopted the previous year. As seen in the photograph H-01513, again the high collared dress indicates Kathleen's constant attention to Victorian stylistic patterns. Changes in this style of dress are the front button enclosure, skirt gathered at the front, and slightly peaked gatherings at the shoulder. Collar and cuff are alike in fabric and detail, slightly ruffled. In photograph HP 50086, Kathleen holds a hat of woven material, similar to the men's top hat, and adorned with a large band of satin fabric and a bow.

When one looks at the relationship of the photographer and subject, it is evident that Kathleen was aware of the role of the photographer in capturing her image. Photography shows the physical truth, but it is the photographer, the subject, and the camera that stage truth. The subject wants

to see an image that is true to their personal associations. To ensure these associations were addressed accurately, the subject would have selected the studio, photographer, dress, as well as posture. These choices all reveal her personal concerns. "People are gendered both by their clothing and by their posture."¹³ In this image, and many other studio photographs of Kathleen, she holds her arms and legs close to her body, presenting a smooth, confined, and reserved image. The majority of Kathleen's photographs present her in bust in portraiture, an image of her head and shoulders. There are also many images of her standing, a few of her seated. In none is she openly smiling. "In Victorian America, sitting was not merely taking a load off your feet. It was a way to reveal character, gender, social class and power."¹⁴ Both sitting and standing positions were staged, as the presentation of self was held up for public scrutiny and evaluation.¹⁵

Photography played with unusual relationships between the subject and the photographer, which toyed with the idea of truthfulness. This relationship would have been partially responsible for the posture and pose of subject. For example, at this sitting, there are four instances where Kathleen looks away from the camera, and one instance where she looks straight ahead at the lens. Was the direction of Kathleen's gaze a request of the photographer, based on his artistic merit? Not only is her posture determined by a personal sense of self-esteem, but by the culture she belongs to, and thus, the photographer that controls it. "As in all portraits, the challenge is to represent sitters in ways that meet their expectations and conform to cultural norms."¹⁶ If Kathleen's posture can be equated to her sense of self-esteem, it must also be mentioned in light of her education at Lady Murray's. Kathleen was known for erect posture,¹⁷ which was achieved at school, spending half an hour a day lying on a backboard.¹⁸

At home, in snapshot photographs likely taken by her brother, Kathleen is posed leaning on the front door of Point Ellice House. In this image, H-04812, she wears full-length feminine riding attire, leather gloves, and a cloche hat. Her gaze is cast downward at the riding whip held in her hands. The image presents a young woman, modestly attired, elegant, and serene.

In another photograph, H-04871, taken in the front driveway at Point Ellice House, she is similarly dressed in stylish riding gear, standing beside her horse, Blackie. Her wide smile and proud

⁹ Jennifer Green-Lewis, *Framing the Victorians: Photography and the Culture of Realism*, (Cornell, Ithaca and London, 1996), 32

¹⁰ *Ibid.* p.34

¹¹ C.K. O'Reilly to F.J. O'Reilly, Campden Hill, 17 May 1884, BC Archives A/E/Or3/Or321.

¹² C.K. O'Reilly to F.J. O'Reilly, Campden Hill, 17 May 1884, BC Archives A/E/Or3/Or321.

¹³ Kenneth L. Ames, "Posture and Power," *Death in the Dining Room and Other Tales of Victorian Culture*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992) 187

¹⁴ *Ibid.* 189

¹⁵ *Ibid.* 189

¹⁶ Ames, p.185

¹⁷ Mrs. E. Sisson. Personal communication and interviewed by Virginia Careless, 22 November 1988.

¹⁸ C.K. O'Reilly to parents. 21 May 1884. O'Reilly papers BC Archives.

stance indicate a love for riding, as well as for her horse. Kathleen is caught in this spontaneous snapshot with a full smile, teeth exposed. This is a rare image, as Kathleen is shy about exposing her teeth, and has previously referred to herself as a “walrus.”¹⁹

Both images depict Kathleen as a stylish girl of active outdoor pursuits, very much determined by her spontaneous smile, and carefully selected riding gear. Other snapshot images of Kathleen show her boating, bicycle riding, and holding a tennis racquet posed by the Point Ellice tennis lawn.

By the time Kathleen returned from England to Victoria in 1884 she is fully aware of the photographer’s ability to tell her story and document her personal interests. These gentle intimate portraits of Kathleen in the entranceway of her home look inward at an increasingly privatized and protected domestic haven, expressing her personal passions.

At the time of this photograph, George Eastman is promoting the Kodak camera, as an instrument easily used by the amateur photographer, and not just by the professional. During Eastman’s early campaign of daylight-loading cameras he emphasized the ease of using the camera. “Anybody can use it. Everybody will use it,” ran the publicity.²⁰ But by 1899, George Eastman had released the revolutionary hand-held Kodak Brownie with the slogan “You press the button, we do the rest” where the amateur was now able to send off the film for processing and no special skills were required.²¹ In the Point Ellice House collection are two Kodak cameras, a No. 4 cartridge camera manufactured in 1897 and one of the first of the folding pocket autographic cameras launched in 1914. However, the back cover of the autographic camera appears to have been added to an original folding pocket camera model 3A, which could date the camera as early as 1909. The introduction of the Kodak camera in August 1888 brought photography to the masses.²² It was introduced in the same way that other consumer products were introduced in a market economy, through mass marketing techniques. For women, Eastman’s advertisements looked inward toward the domestic theme, encouraging the use of the camera as a tool to create a personal record. Eastman’s advertisements appeared in the same ladies’ journals Kathleen purchased. This message was also directed largely at the middle class,²³ who could afford the pleasures of this new technology. In deconstructing the elements of these amateur photographs, Kathleen’s understanding of how the camera operates is brought forth, whether it was used in the studio or by the amateur in the family.

In 1888, the O’Reilly family vacationed in England and Europe, and Kathleen chose to have her photograph taken in a number of studios. In photographs, HP 50082 and C-03885, taken by Lambert Weston & Son, Folkestone, England, she chooses to adorn herself with an elaborately fur-trimmed suit and high hat. This attire is indicative

of a woman attending to the concerns of high fashion and maintaining her role in high society. Neither of these items are particularly practical in nature, nor could they be seen as reminiscent of former maternal influence for simplicity and order. Here she is a poised young woman of solid, upper middle class parentage, flaunting her love of high fashion. In other instances, Kathleen’s personal sense of “style seems to come through and her presence makes a bolder statement.”²⁴

Kathleen and her parents travelled through Spain as part of this trip in 1888. Kathleen’s appreciation of this foreign place is indicated in her letter home to brother Frank, so too is her appreciation for the arrival of her clothing. “My dear Frank, . . . it has been a lovely trip through orange groves, by mountains & plains & at times the train passes so close to the shores of the Mediterranean



BC Archives HP-50088



that you can see the pebbles on the beach under the water... You will imagine I was glad to see my box last Sunday morning & be able to get a change of things."²⁵

At the time, Kathleen stops at the photographer L. Sanchez, Calle Zaragoza 12, Madrid. The photograph of Kathleen in the Spanish studio, HP 50080, is a remarkable indication of her personal interest in fashion, and an obvious act of self-representation. The Spanish mantilla she has chosen is an elaborate piece as it frames the beauty she is so obviously aware of. Graced with a beauty that was timeless rather than simply fashionable, Kathleen took advantage of her presentation in front of the camera. In her gloved hands she holds an exquisitely detailed fan, and on her shoulder sits an exotic Spanish flower. As she rests upon a prop provided by the photographer, she is photographed against a backdrop of exotic foliage. This Spanish photographer has nearly turned the photograph into a painting. In fact, Kathleen is so delighted by this image of herself that a painting is commissioned at this same studio, HP 50081, based on this photograph. Note that this is the only time she chooses to portray herself in the costume of an exotic culture, although she travelled in other countries, as far away as Rome. Her choice to wear this outfit, while travelling with

her mother, may be an indication of Kathleen's independence from her mother's influence.

Focusing on dreams rather than reality, these photographs of Kathleen in elaborate costume capture her personal desires and fantasies. In photographs of herself, she owns the right to self-representation, and uses it to present her personal story. When the images are professionally taken, there is a contract between photographer and subject quite different from amateur photography. Personal photographs are specifically made to portray the individual or group as they would wish to be seen and as they have chosen to show themselves to others.²⁶ Kathleen is quite obviously announcing a personal interest with the exotic and beautiful.

Throughout her life, Kathleen visits the studio of Lambert, Weston and Son many times. In 1888, four photographs, including two bust portraits, HP 50084 & HP 87413, and two standing three-quarter length portraits, C-03896 & HP 50085, are produced from this sitting. These portraits show an evolution in Kathleen's hairstyle, again, according to fashion. Worn with confidence, this formal gown has a low, V-shaped neckline and shorter sleeves. Almost considered daring, the neckline's lowest point is enhanced with a large floral corsage, while the choker-style necklace draws attention to her graceful neck. Another indication of self-confidence is the jewelled pin on her breast, which bears the letter "K" for her name. These personal decisions to announce herself to the viewer were clearly chosen by Kathleen in preparation for this sitting. Kathleen was not known to flaunt her beauty and womanly figure, or known as the outgoing type, but was described as pretty but modest,²⁷ and she referred to herself as being shy.²⁸

These photographs can be compared to another photograph taken at this time on Kathleen's return to the Taber studio in San Francisco. Here, the daring line of her dress is presented to the camera, as the elegant arch of the fabric drops to expose her back. Again, Kathleen has adorned herself with a floral corsage, as she holds a bouquet of flowers in her hands. Such floral additions to her attire may have been merely a reflection of Victorian fashion with flowers, but they also echo her personal attachment to the gardens of Point Ellice.

In this image, HP 50119, she is seated at the center of family and close friends on the tennis lawn at Point Ellice House. The photographer,

Left: HP 50080
Kathleen O'Reilly, age 21,
1888, in Spanish attire.
Studio of L. Sanchez,
Spain.

Opposite page:
HP-50086
Kathleen O'Reilly, age 17,
1884. Lambert Weston &
Son Studio, Folkestone,
England.

¹⁹ C.K. O'Reilly to parents.
7 November 1884.

O'Reilly papers BC
Archives

²⁰ Patricia Holland, "How
Sweet is it to Scan:
Personal Photographs and
Popular Photography," in
*Photography, A Critical
Introduction*, ed. Liz Wells
(New York: Routledge,
1997) 129

²¹ *Ibid.*, p.105

²² James E. Paster,
"Advertising Immortality
by Kodak," *History of
Photography* (London:
Journal Publisher: Taylor
& Francis Ltd, London),
vol. 16, no. 2 (Summer
1992): p.135

²³ Holland, p.129

²⁴ Careless, p.29

²⁵ C.K. O'Reilly to E.J.
O'Reilly, Barcelona,
Spain, 20 April 1888, BC
Archives A/E/Or3/
Or321

²⁶ Holland, p.107

²⁷ Agnes Murray to C.A.
O'Reilly, 27 April 1885.
O'Reilly papers, BC
Archives.

²⁸ C.K. O'Reilly to C.A.
O'Reilly, 26 June 1885.
O'Reilly papers, BC
Archives.



Above: HP-87413
Kathleen O'Reilly, age
21, 1888. Lambert
Weston & Son studio,
Folkestone, England.

brought to Point Ellice to take this photograph, may have selected this arrangement. In any case, the posture and gaze of each individual is quite uniquely their own.

The only one looking directly at the camera, Kathleen sits upright and proper as she would for a studio photograph. Pose, posture, and bright clothing all combine to make Kathleen the focal point and centre of this photograph. This gaze and posture indicate that she is comfortable in front of the camera, while others shy away with downward and cast-off glances. On the

bench, her father sits in a position of authority, looking off to the horizon, with his arm propped on the backrest and right hand steady on his cane. Mother Caroline is seated in a reserved and orderly position, eyes directed towards her hands, which are placed neatly on her lap. The Colonel is positioned on the edge of the bench, indicating the casual nature of this event. Both of Kathleen's brothers are seated to her right, somewhat slumped over while their hats nearly fall over their eyes.

Stanhope, her suitor at the time, is comfortably leaning back into Kathleen's personal space. Having casually cast his hat and racket to the side, while seated very close to the dog, his posture indicates a very nonchalant attitude.

Naval officer Lieutenant-Commander Henry Stanhope, thirty-six year old heir to the Earl of Chesterfield, was very fond of Kathleen. He courted her for several years, before proposing marriage in 1892. Initially, twenty-five-year-old Kathleen was very vague, and eventually denied his request. Kathleen wrote in a letter to her father, "I did not want to be married, I love being here with you all & though you may think that I am discontented, I am not—and I don't believe any one has ever had a happier house & life than I have."

Stanhope writes to Peter with hopes of win-

ning his approval, expressing concern for Kathleen's well being. "Dear Mr. Peter O'Reilly, ...how could she be expected to look with anything but shudder at a prospect so uncertain, and give up her home and her horse, and all her other things, and leave her parents, who are so devoted to her, & she to them, in complete uncertainty as to when or how would see them again."²⁹ These actions have no effect on Kathleen's decision, as she decides to remain with her family at beloved Point Ellice.

At the Lafayette studio, photographs A-07106 and PE 975.1.9247 document Kathleen's presentation to the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, Lord Cadogan, at Dublin Castle. Having been encouraged by the family to have these photos taken, as noted in a letter before this event, Kathleen is told "Don't forget the photo."³⁰ The family knew this photograph would appear in the contemporary journal, *Ladies Pictorial*. A prestigious event, Kathleen is presented in the most elaborate dress she has ever worn, as an expanse of fabric and flowers cascades down the stairs behind her. The enormous bouquet and headpiece were suited for royalty, not exactly the colonial type seen in British Columbia. Kathleen's presentation mirrors that of a princess, certainly the highlight in any woman's quest for fashion perfected. Yet, Kathleen downplays it all and does not revel in this glory.

She writes "My dear Father, ...I had no intention of going to the Drawing Room. It was on the spur of the moment and I wonder what you will think of my going! It was strange Carry [Dunsmuir] wrote me some time ago she had her dress and w[oul]d like to present me in London! I said No I did not care for it & it was not worth the expense but I could not have gone to the Ball at the Castle without being presented. Old Scotter charged 10 pounds for my train, of course it will make a dress..." Instead, she yearns for home and gardens "...Carry w[oul]d like to take me & Josephine to the Drawing Room here in May & all go to the Buckingham Palace Garden Party. I think I had better be at the Point Ellice House Garden Party, what do you say."³¹ (10 March 1897, Baileys Hotel, London)

In another letter to her family, Kathleen expresses concern about the amount she has spent on accessories for the event "...I did not mean to have a bouquet for the Drawing Room as it is not necessary if one has a fan, and I had the Annie Pooley one. I don't know what you will say to all this extravagance write as soon as you can & fully

²⁹ Stanhope to Peter O'Reilly, Banff Hotel, 22 August 1892, Add Mss 412, Box 1 File 18, Point Ellice House collection.

³⁰ Peter O'Reilly to C.K O'Reilly, Victoria, 8 December 1896, O'Reilly letters 1896-1897. p.4



Left:A-07106
*Kathleen O'Reilly, age
30, 27 February 1897, in
her presentation gown.
Presentation to Lord
Lieutenant of Ireland.
Photographed by Lafayette,
Photographer to The
Queen, London England
and Dublin, Ireland.*

BC Archives A-07106

about commissions and exporting.”

Partaking in a grand social whirl, these letters may document the “life of a well-to-do, upper-class young lady of the late 1890s.”³² However, these letters also indicate her concern for the extravagance and expense.

One only has to examine the photograph of Kathleen in the garden, H-05582, to see that she was happy at home. She smiles while carrying an armful of flowers. The amateur family photographer has taken this image of their beloved Kathleen, surrounded by the gardens she and her father had developed together.

Several amateur photographs exist of Kathleen in the gardens and on the lawns of Point Ellice, but many more studio images exist. The O’Reilly family understood the value of a photograph, and often requested the image of their precious Kathleen be taken. “I have not yet seen the photos of my girl where are they?”³³ Photograph I-51782, which shows Kathleen adjusting the shade of the back window at Point Ellice, is the typical amateur photograph, as it is candid, informal and spontaneous. Taken by a family member with the Cartridge Kodak No.4, this image of Kathleen may have been taken for several other reasons.

By the turn of the century, Kodak no longer promoted the camera’s instantaneous capabilities that were novelty in the 1888 promotions. Instead, the idea of the snapshot’s value as an aid to memory was promoted. The idea that photography could be used to capture and save moments is evident in Eastman’s advertising campaign, con-

taining such slogans as “...a means of keeping green the Christmas memories.”

1903: “A vacation without a Kodak is a vacation wasted.” 1904: “Where there’s a child, there should the Kodak be. As a means of keeping green the Christmas memories, or as a gift, it’s a holiday delight.” 1905: “Bring your Vacation Home in a Kodak.” 1907: “In every home there’s a story for the Kodak to record - not merely a travel story and the story of summer holidays, but the story of Christmas, of the winter evening gathering and of the house party.”

1909: “There are Kodak stories everywhere.”³⁴

Eastman’s advertisements would have been present in the ladies’ journals that Kathleen was fond of. The nature of the Kodak camera, as it relates to lasting human concerns, would have appealed to this family. As early as 1897, amateur photographs at Point Ellice captured memories of Kathleen. Amateur photographs act as carriers of meaning and interpretations. They record and reflect on daily activities, delicately holding within the innocent-seeming image much that is intimate.³⁵

In her thirties, Kathleen lost both her mother and father. Caroline’s death in 1899 requires Kathleen to take on the responsibility of caring for her father at Point Ellice, which resulted in fewer trips overseas. In 1905, Peter dies, leaving Kathleen to tend the home for her brother and his wife. She is content within the confines of her home, maintaining the gardens of Point Ellice. Her personal photographs and the photographs taken by family members would have comforted Kathleen as her family disappeared. Now her photographs have become part of the complex network of memories and meanings that made sense of Kathleen’s daily life.

This formal photograph taken inside Point Ellice House, HP 50078, is that of a woman of upper social class residing in a regal, yet dim environment. The dark clothing, sombre expression and surrounding do not resemble the romantic studio photographs from the past. She belonged to a minority, unmarried, a woman of independence having rejected a proposal for marriage. While she does not fit the typical model of the married, middle-class woman, she is content to reside at Point Ellice. In her twenties, she was



Right:
HP 50119. Kathleen
O’Reilly seated at the
centre of family and close
friends on the tennis lawn
at Point Ellice House.

Opposite page: C-03924



Left: H-05582 Kathleen O'Reilly, circa 1905, in the garden at Point Ellice. Unknown amateur photographer.

fulfilled emotionally by the love of her parents and brothers. Now as a spinster, Kathleen lives out her life at Point Ellice, vacant of the social activity and elaborate affairs.

It has been argued that Kathleen used photography as a measure of success, confirming her position within society. The elements of every portrait were carefully composed to illustrate the full extent and diversity of Kathleen's lifestyle. Such a portrait was a personal statement of financial and social status, and successful lifestyle choice. Those who saw these images would have looked upon them as all that was tasteful and refined. To colonials who brought with them conservative views on government, home, and society based upon British traditions and Victorian taste, photographs of elegant settings and genteel pastimes concerned the creation of civilized society, and an ordered landscape in an isolated corner of the Empire.

Kathleen would have chosen how she wanted to be portrayed in front of the camera. Her choice of dress, the studio she attended, and the consistency of this practice proved her self-worth. Kathleen would have made a conscious decision to attend the studio of a photographer. Often, she selected one photographer, and visited his studio on several occasions, such as Lambert, Weston and

Son, whom she frequented in trips to the Folkestone area. The decision to have her likeness captured by an English photographer, as opposed to studios in Victoria, is an indication of her sense of self-identity within British practices.

Photography can be placed within broader theoretical debates and understandings, either pertaining to meaning and communication, or to visual culture and representation. Kathleen's interests and self-expression can be extracted from the deconstruction of elements of each photograph. Photographed in so many instances, the collection of images provided Kathleen and her friends and family with a memory of her life constructed according to her values. These images can best be understood as Kathleen's romanticized story of her life. Photography, then and now, is a creative, cultural practice and must be traced back to its significance in personal and social terms. ∞

³¹ C.K. O'Reilly to Peter O'Reilly, Point Ellice, Victoria, BC Archives, location unknown.

³² James K. Nesbitt, *Kathleen O'Reilly Mingled with Dublin Society*, Point Ellice House Web site, <<http://collections.ic.gc.ca/peh/tour/news.htm>>.

³³ Peter O'Reilly to C.K. O'Reilly, Victoria, May 25, 1897, O'Reilly letters 1896-1897. p. 21

³⁴ Paster, p. 135

³⁵ Holland, p. 106