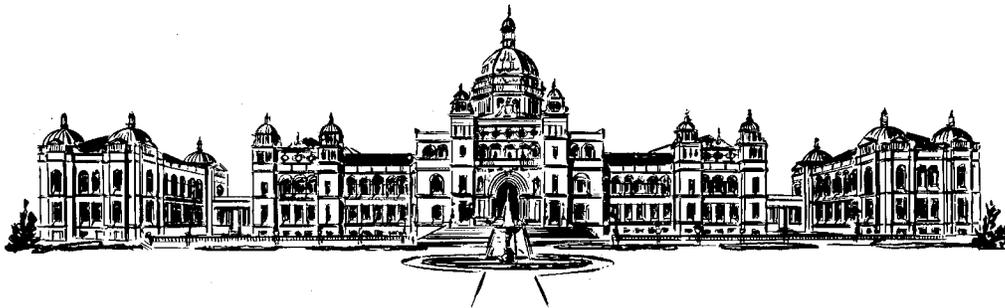


A Review of the Depiction of Aboriginal Peoples in the  
Artworks of the Parliament Buildings

Report of the  
Speaker's Advisory Panel

Legislative Assembly of  
British Columbia



2001





March 28, 2001

To the Honourable,  
The Speaker of the  
Legislative Assembly  
of the Province of British Columbia  
Victoria, British Columbia

Honourable Speaker:

We herewith transmit our report titled "A Review of the Depiction of Aboriginal Artwork in the Parliament Buildings" which we are issuing to you as Chair of the Legislative Assembly Management Committee.

Respectfully submitted,

Dr. Jo-ann Archibald

Dr. John Lutz

Dr. Jean Barman

Tsaqwasupp (Mr. Art Thompson)

Dr. Martha Black



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

|   |    |
|---|----|
| COMPOSITION OF THE PANEL.....   | I  |
| TERMS OF REFERENCE.....   | 3  |
| INTRODUCTION.....   | 5  |
| CONCERNS RAISED BY FIRST NATIONS.....   | 7  |
| First Nations Summit Task Group.....  | 7  |
| Chiefs of the Lekwammen People.....   | 8  |
| HISTORICAL AND ARTISTIC VALUE OF THE MURALS.....                              | 11 |
| The Southwell Murals.....   | 11 |
| Southwell and the Murals' Creation.....                                       | 12 |
| The Murals in Artistic Context.....   | 14 |
| IMAGE AND MESSAGE RESPECTING ABORIGINAL PEOPLE THAT THE MURALS<br>CONVEY..... | 17 |
| OPTIONS TO ADDRESS THE CONCERNS RAISED BY FIRST NATIONS.....                  | 25 |
| 1. Leave the murals as they are.....  | 25 |
| 2. Leave the murals as they are with the addition of other materials.....     | 25 |
| 3. Alter the murals to cover up offending aspects.....                        | 27 |
| 4. Cover up the murals.....   | 28 |
| 5. Remove the murals.....   | 28 |
| RECOMMENDATION.....   | 31 |
| APPENDIX: SOUTHWELL THE ARTIST.....   | 35 |



# COMPOSITION OF THE PANEL

## MEMBERS

---

**Dr. Jo-ann Archibald**

Director, First Nations House of Learning, University of British Columbia  
Associate Professor of Education, University of British Columbia

**Dr. Jean Barman**

Professor of Education, University of British Columbia

**Dr. Martha Black**

Curator of Ethnology, Royal British Columbia Museum

**Dr. John Lutz**

Assistant Professor of History, University of Victoria

**Tsaqwasupp (Mr. Art Thompson)**

Aboriginal artist, educator and lecturer on Northwest coast art and culture

## CLERK TO THE PANEL

---

**Ms. Kate Ryan-Lloyd**

Committee Clerk



# TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Speaker's Advisory Panel shall review the four murals in the rotunda of the Parliament Buildings, and in particular the depiction of Aboriginal people therein.

In the course of their review, the panel shall consider:

- options to address the concerns raised by the First Nations Summit Task Group
- the image and message respecting Aboriginal people that the murals convey
- the historical and artistic value of the murals; and,
- any other factors the panel deems appropriate.

The panel may consult with persons and organizations as it deems appropriate. It will recommend to the Speaker a course of action that will address the concerns expressed by the First Nations Summit Task Group.

The recommendations of the panel regarding the above considerations will be submitted to the Speaker.



# INTRODUCTION

The Speaker's Advisory Panel on Murals in the Parliament Buildings was struck by the Speaker of the British Columbia Legislative Assembly, Hon. Bill Hartley, on 30 November 2000. The panel's five members were mandated to "review the four murals in the lower rotunda of the Parliament Buildings, and in particular the depiction of Aboriginal People therein," and to "recommend to the Speaker a course of action that will address the concerns expressed by the First Nations Summit Task Group."

The panel's terms of reference specified four areas for consideration: "options to address the concerns raised by the First Nations Summit Task Group, the image and message respecting Aboriginal people that the murals convey, the historical and artistic value of the murals, and any other factors the panel deems appropriate." These four areas form the basis for this report.

The panel met seven times in the Parliament Buildings: 14 December 2000 and 9, 22, 29 January, 5, 12 February and 21 March 2001. Its deliberations were assisted in two ways. Kate Ryan-Lloyd, Committee Clerk with the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia, arranged for a thorough search of newspaper and archival materials relevant to the panel's mandate and provided copies of a technical report by conservator, Cheryle Harrison. Secondly, the panel was given authority to "consult with persons and organizations as it deems appropriate." Invited to meet with the panel were: Gary Mitchell, Provincial Archivist, British Columbia Archives; Dr. Martin Segger, author of the only history of the Parliament Buildings (*The British Columbia Parliament Buildings*. Arcon: Vancouver, 1979); the First Nations Summit Task Group, represented by Hemas Kla-Lee-Lee-Kla (Bill Wilson). The latter two accepted the panel's invitation and appeared, respectively, on 9 and 22 January. E. George MacMinn, Clerk of the Legislative Assembly, appeared before the panel on 9 January to report his conversations with two granddaughters and a grandniece of George Southwell. The panel invited two representatives of the Lekwammen people, on whose traditional territory the Parliament Buildings are located, to appear before the panel on 21 March. Chief Robert Sam is chief of the Songhees people and Chief Andy Thomas is hereditary chief of the Esquimalt nation. Ron Hamilton, also addressed the panel on 21 March in his capacity as a cultural advisor on the Nuuchahnulth people. Ian Thom, Senior Curator, Vancouver Art Gallery, provided the panel with the benefit of his art historical expertise via conversations with panel member, Dr. Martha Black. The panel is very grateful for their time and thoughtful consideration of the panel's mandate and of questions put to them. The panel also wishes to express its appreciation to Kate Ryan-Lloyd for her administrative and procedural support of the panel during its deliberations.



# CONCERNS RAISED BY FIRST NATIONS

## FIRST NATIONS SUMMIT TASK GROUP

---

The impetus to the panel is the concerns raised by the First Nations Summit Task Group about the four murals in the rotunda of the Parliament Buildings. These concerns were put in a letter of 23 June 2000 from the First Nations Summit Task Group, under the signature of Grand Chief Ed John, Kathryn Teneese, and Bill Wilson, to the Honourable Andrew Petter, Attorney General and Minister for Human Rights. "Regarding certain paintings in the rotunda of the legislative buildings," the letter stated:

These paintings of bare-breasted Aboriginal women and of Aboriginal persons in subservient positions are, we are sure you will understand, highly offensive, demeaning and degrading to First Nations people in the province.

In speaking with the panel on 22 January 2001, Hemas Kla-Lee-Lee-Kla (Bill Wilson) added some perspective to the concerns of the First Nations Summit Task Group.

[These murals] may be reflective of attitudes of white people at the time [they were painted] but that doesn't make it right. ... [They] depict a relationship with Aboriginal people that, if it ever existed, is over. The murals give the impression that the relationship still exists. .... [They] are one of the most blatant examples of white superiority that exists in this province.

The First Nations Summit Task Group's correspondence presented one option to address its concerns. "We therefore feel that these paintings should be removed as soon as possible" their letter of 23 June concluded. The Office of the Premier then referred the Summit's concerns to the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly, the Honourable Bill Hartley, on the grounds that the Speaker represents all members of the Legislative Assembly and also has jurisdiction over the Parliament Buildings. The Speaker met with the First Nations Summit Task Group on 31 July. At that meeting it was agreed that the paintings should not be damaged or destroyed by whatever course of action is eventually taken. A letter from the Task Group to Speaker Hartley, dated 21 August 2000, confirmed the sense of the meeting:

Our position is not that these paintings be destroyed but rather removed to another place and we have asked the Speaker to strike a committee to determine how these Murals can be removed in an appropriate and timely manner.

This position was slightly modified in a follow-up letter of 1 September: "we would like to see the paintings removed, or covered up." A letter of 8 December, following the panel's creation, stated:

The First Nations Summit continues to call for the immediate removal of the paintings. While we are not suggesting these paintings be destroyed, they must be removed from the Parliament Buildings.

Their correspondence to the Speaker, dated 21 August 2000, also stated their request that all Members of the Legislative Assembly support them in their call for the removal of the murals "to ensure that the Legislature is a place that upholds the highest standards of respect for all peoples."

In January 2001, Hemas Kla-Lee-Lee-Kla (Bill Wilson) reiterated to the panel the Summit's position that the four murals be "removed, preserved." He told the panel:

Have them put in a place where they are reflective of Indian history. The Summit thinks they should be preserved as part of our history but not here. ... They represent an attitude that needs to be remembered but not as the primary center in the Parliament Buildings [which should] reflect the contributions of all the people that built this province.

Each of the letters from the First Nations Summit Task Group, as well as Hemas Kla-Lee-Lee-Kla (Bill Wilson), has urged an expeditious resolution. The letter of 23 June asked for "a response to our concerns" by 31 July. The letter of 1 September requested that "the paintings [be] removed, or covered up, no later than November 30, 2000." The 8 December letter stated that "we ... expect the removal of the paintings to begin by the end of January 2001."

## CHIEFS OF THE LEKWAMMEN PEOPLE

---

The panel invited the chiefs of the Lekwammen people on whose traditional territory the Parliament Buildings are located to share their views on the murals. Chief Robert Sam of the Songhees nation and hereditary Chief Andy Thomas of the Esquimalt nation appeared before the panel on 21 March 2001.

Chief Sam amplified the First Nations Summit Task Group's concerns explaining his position with three points: that the murals are not factual; that they perpetuate negative stereotypes of Aboriginal persons; and, that they perpetuate colonial attitudes at a time when new relationships with Aboriginal people should be nurtured and made productive. Prior to his appearance before the panel, Chief Sam consulted with Songhees elders, who reiterated that the Aboriginal women depicted in the murals were always clothed in some fashion, often with cloaks or cedar skirts. The children were also always covered in some way. In arguing for removal of the murals, Chief Sam described the necessity for non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal people to build new relationships. "We can not do this until the murals are addressed. This is not

productive. We talk about respect for art, what we need to talk about is respect for our people.”

Chief Andy Thomas also supported the First Nations Summit Task Group position on removal of the murals. He clearly described his people’s alienation from the Parliament Buildings and its players and processes in saying: “We didn’t have control over things happening in this Building and we still don’t.”

Both Chief Sam and Chief Thomas do not view the covering of the murals as a viable option. They fear that if the murals are now covered, they would likely be uncovered for “historical” reasons at some future date. Chief Thomas explained: “It is an old history, a sad history. Some old things may be historical and worth keeping, but in this case, they are just old.”



# HISTORICAL AND ARTISTIC VALUE OF THE MURALS

Far less seems to have survived about the history of the murals than might be expected given their central location in the rotunda of the Parliament Buildings. In his well-researched history of the Parliament Buildings, Dr. Martin Segger wrote:

In 1932, Provincial Secretary S.L. Howe commissioned George H. Southwell to paint a series for panels for the entrance rotunda. These were to be a personal gift [of Howe] to the province. In the specifications, Howe called for topics which would illustrate "the historical qualities necessary for the establishment of a civilization." (Segger, *The British Columbia Parliament Buildings*, p. 68)

The *Province* newspaper pointed out on 18 July 1932 how it was "in his private capacity as a citizen" that Howe commissioned Southwell. This aspect of the murals was also emphasized in the action taken by the British Columbia Legislative Assembly the next 5 April:

By leave of the House, ... it was Resolved unanimously, --

That the thanks of the House be tendered to the Hon. S.L. Howe, Provincial Secretary, for his generosity in providing the splendid mural decorations, representative of the early history of the Province, in the lower rotunda of the Parliament Buildings. (*Journals of the Legislative Assembly*, 5 April 1833, p. 1933)

An article in the *Daily Colonist* the next day referred to "the public-spirited action of the Provincial Secretary in his personal gift to the Province." In the newspaper's view, "the contribution that Colonel Howe is making towards the cultural advancement of the province and public appreciation of pioneer life will remain as a tribute to his ideals as long as the Parliament Buildings stand" (*Daily Colonist*, 6 April 1833, p.1).

## THE SOUTHWELL MURALS

---

Dr. Segger explained how "two sets of paintings were produced, one for the ground level foyer and a second for the rotunda vaults" (Segger, p.68). The first set of four murals, created with oil paint laid on the smooth plaster wall surface of the ground level of the central rotunda, was completed in 1935. Segger described their content:

1. *Courage*. The meeting of Captains Vancouver and Quadra at Nootka Sound in 1792.
2. *Enterprise*. Hudson's Bay Co. Chief Factor, James Douglas, landing from the *Cadboro* at Clover Point to select the site for Fort Victoria [1843]

3. *Labour*. The building of Fort Victoria [1843](also described as the building of Fort Langley [late 1820s])
4. *Justice*. Colonial Chief Justice Sir Matthew Baillie Begbie holding court in Clinton during the Cariboo gold rush [early 1860s]. (Segger, p.68)

The murals artist, George Southwell, explained in an interview the rationale behind them. As for *Labour* whose "bare-breasted Aboriginal women" have raised concerns by the First Nations Summit Task Group: "In *Labour*, Douglas is shown as superintending the erection, construction and completion of a fort to protect the new colonists who have hewed the trees from the wilderness to build their homes and plant the nucleus of a western civilization" (*Sun*, 28 May 1938). According to Southwell:

The panel, *Justice*, is of an incident of later date, when Judge Begbie and Secretary Pooley visited Clinton to pacify troublesome Indians who threatened war on the whites and by brilliant compromise and fine judgement, their efforts culminated in success. ... There are many figures of various types including settlers, miners, voyageurs, packers, trappers and prospectors who are still to be found there. (*Sun*, 28 May 1938).

Southwell did not discuss the other two murals in the interview.

Each of the four lower murals occupies its own double niche in the central rotunda of the Parliament Buildings. The lower rectangular section is 55 inches high by 82 inches wide, 1400 x 2080 mm. The upper semi-circular segment is 41 inches high by 82 inches wide, 1040 x 2080 mm. The strip separating the upper and lower parts of each mural contained its title. These strips were painted over prior to 1977.

Southwell painted a second set of four murals on canvas to illustrate "the four basic industries of the Province--logging, mining, fishing and farming" (Segger, p.68). His failing eyesight prevented their completion until after the Second World War. (*Province*, 27 April 1946). Intended for the rotunda vaults eighty feet from the ground, they were installed in 1952. Three of the four depict young men, the logger being based on one of Southwell's sons (Aubin Van Berckel in *Sun*, 22 August 2000), the fourth a young woman. None of the four upper murals were included in the panel's terms of reference.

## SOUTHWELL AND THE MURALS' CREATION

---

The murals' creator, George Southwell, was described by Segger as "well qualified for the commission" (Segger, p.68). Segger wrote about him:

Born ... in 1865, at the age of twenty-one he won a scholarship at Kensington School of Art and went on to study at the Slade. Practicing as a commercial artist

he executed a mural depicting the industries of Britain for the 1888 Paris Exposition and in 1908 produced a bas-relief mural on the same subject for the Brussels Exposition. Arriving in Vancouver in 1910, Southwell spent a number of years sketching and painting the interior of the Province. During the 1920s he executed murals and illustrated books before being employed by the Provincial Government Publicity Bureau as "provincial artist". In this position he spent a number of years travelling throughout British Columbia painting the life and scenery, producing some 200 paintings sent abroad to promote the splendours and products of the province. (Segger, p.68)

Southwell's career as an artist is elaborated in an appendix to this report.

The murals' historic and artistic value is bound up with their creation and artist. The murals were not, it is important to keep in mind, a government project. They were not commissioned by the province, and it does not appear that any official panel or other group decided on their content. The murals' creator, George Southwell, was a working artist for half a century in British Columbia specializing in historical evocations, portraits, and landscapes. It is unclear who decided on the murals' subject matter, but it was similar to the work being done by Southwell's colleague, John Innes and by his mentor Bruce McKelvie. Southwell put the murals' purpose as illustrating "the historical qualities necessary for the establishment of a civilization" (*Sun*, 9 February 1952).

When the Parliament Buildings were completed in 1903, the rotunda did not have murals. Much of the original paint scheme and decorations were left uncompleted as the project was finished over budget. Even today, there are several alcoves intended for statuary that have never been filled. The Legislative Assembly unanimously passed a motion on 5 April 1933 accepting the gift of the murals and thanking the donor, the Honourable S. L. Howe, Provincial Secretary.

The Legislature's 1933 motion indicated that the murals were seen to be "representative of the early history of the Province." George Southwell, like the mural's donor and the others, was part of a generation of British Columbians concerned to generate interest in the province and its history by representing it as an exciting and dynamic place. They did so through a variety of means, including writing, as with McKelvie, and painting, as with Innes and Southwell. According to Southwell's granddaughter, "He was a product of his age, a true romantic who delighted in unearthing the exotic and the new" (Aubin Van Berckel in *Sun*, 22 August 2000). The murals reveal far more about the priorities of the time they were initiated and constructed than they do about the time period being imagined in them.

## THE MURALS IN ARTISTIC CONTEXT

---

At the time when the murals were commissioned, the *Daily Colonist* reported that Southwell's paintings "have been greatly admired by resident and visiting art connoisseurs" (*Daily Colonist* 6 April 1933). Although his reputation has faded and few examples of his paintings are in public collections in the province (British Columbia Archives lists sixteen works on its web site, noted in the Appendix, and the Vancouver Art Gallery does not have an example of his work), Southwell was considered the "Dean of our Artists" in the 1950s (*Sun*, 18 October 1952). His open-studio exhibits in Vancouver were popular, he was a respected teacher, and among his many works was a mural for the Devonshire Hotel, Vancouver. Just because Southwell is no longer a big name among today's relatively small roster of historical artists in British Columbia that are currently remembered does not mean that his work can be dismissed as insignificant. Re-evaluation of artists and their works is constant in the study and critique of the visual arts. There is no doubt that Southwell's paintings and career will be of interest to future historians of the visual arts in British Columbia, and that the murals will be central to any re-evaluation of his practice. In the current debate about the future of the murals, it is important to realize that the study of art in British Columbia is rudimentary. For example, there is no teacher at any of the universities in the province whose primary research and majority of teaching is focused on historical British Columbia visual art and artists. A recent book by Ian Thom, Senior Curator of the Vancouver Art Gallery, entitled *Art British Columbia: Masterpieces from British Columbia* (2000) is an excellent survey but is not, and was not intended to be, a comprehensive history.

Not only is there no definitive study to date, but the first extensive exhibit of British Columbia art took place less than fifty years ago. In 1958, to mark the British Columbia centennial year, an exhibit entitled *100 Years of British Columbia Art* was held at the Vancouver Art Gallery. Southwell was represented by a small (11 ½" x 15") oil on canvas from 1945, borrowed from a private collector: *War Canoes at Fort Hardy*. The painting was included in the section, "Early British Columbia Painting and Sculpture," along with works by artists who are not well-known names today and some who are, such as B.C. Binning, Emily Carr, Jack Shadbolt, Mildred Valley Thornton, Ina Uhthoff, and Fred Varley. The Aboriginal theme of the painting by Southwell selected for exhibit allies him with Carr, Shadbolt, Thornton, and others who used such Northwest Coast themes, somewhat romantically, to symbolize the province. Carr has become one of the most popular and respected of these artists, but this was not always the case; Carr's paintings were denigrated during her lifetime. As a prominent member of the Victoria Arts and Crafts Society, Southwell championed Carr because, "The pictures at that time might have seemed to some to be crude and

violent, but he felt democratically that they represented phases of art in British Columbia and therefore should be exhibited whether people approved or not” (*Province*, 27 April 1946). This is an argument that can be equally applied to Southwell’s own paintings in the Legislature. Carr’s depictions of Aboriginal villages, like Southwell’s murals, have been the focus of criticism by Aboriginal people but, since they are in art galleries and not in the Legislature, there is no suggestion that they should not be shown.

Southwell’s Legislature murals are also of interest to scholars and artists because the treatment of their subject matter is perceived as typical of the time. The murals are allegories in the established genre of History Painting. They reveal attitudes of the 1930s that characterize Aboriginal people as active but secondary players in the British colonial drama as well as the belief that Aboriginal and colonizing societies could co-exist peacefully in a social structure governed by hierarchies based on race, class and gender. Stylistically, they are interesting because Southwell aligned himself with the Impressionists. Although his work was not included in the exhibit catalogue, *Impressionism in Canada, 1895-1935* (Art Gallery of Ontario travelling exhibit, 1974), several Slade-trained artists who were his contemporaries were included.

Impressionism was, at its inception a radical style, but it became conventionalized and mainstream as its influence spread to the U.S., Canada, and elsewhere. Southwell’s paintings are part of this phenomenon.

Southwell’s Legislature murals are also significant in the context of Canadian mural painting, according to Ian Thom. Few examples of mural painting from the period survive in. As in Ontario, where members of the Group of Seven were commissioned to produce public art, British Columbia once had a number of examples of mural painting by recognized local artists. For example, Edward J. Hughes, Paul A. Goranson, and Orville Fisher received a prestigious commission in 1938 to create murals for the B.C. government pavilion at the World’s Fair in San Francisco. In Vancouver and New Westminster between 1935 and 1941, these artists also painted murals for the First United Church, a restaurant called the W.K. Oriental Gardens, the Canadian Pacific Exhibition, St. Peter’s Church, and the Edward Hotel. In Nanaimo, they painted murals for the Malaspina Hotel. Goranson’s themes for the latter commission - *Lieut. Malaspina Fur Trading* and *Galiano and Valdes Landing at Departure Bay* – are similar to Southwell’s subjects. Because Goranson worked on sketches for murals in the Parliament Buildings before that project was put on hold during World War II, the subjects of the Malaspina Hotel decorations may have been directly related to Goranson’s work for the Legislature. The relationship between Goranson’s decorative scheme and Southwell’s murals is a subject for future research, but Goranson’s Malaspina Hotel subjects in general support the argument that

romantic depictions of the early days of the European presence in B.C. were standard subjects for public art at the time. For more information on Goranson and his colleagues, see: MacDonald, Colin. *A Dictionary of Canadian Artists*. Ottawa: Canadian Paperbacks Publishers, 1997. The Malaspina Hotel murals have been removed from the wall for preservation and are now in storage. The San Francisco murals have been destroyed. Southwell's Devonshire Hotel mural appears not to have survived. Therefore, the Legislature murals constitute one of the only examples of mural painting from the 1930s left in British Columbia. The fact that the Legislature murals appear to have been modeled closely on very large murals on the themes of *Industry* and *Labour* that Southwell did for the British section of the Paris Exposition of 1888 and for the Brussels Exposition of 1908 add to their importance as examples of the genre of allegorical public painting that was once so important.

# IMAGE AND MESSAGE RESPECTING ABORIGINAL PEOPLE THAT THE MURALS CONVEY

Consideration of the image and message respecting Aboriginal people that the murals convey must include the distinctive character of the art form as well as the time period of their creation. Murals, by definition, consist of two parts. The first is the murals themselves. The second is the setting in which they are placed. As put by conservator Cheryle Harrison, "A mural is an integral part of the architecture it completes" (*Proposal*, 10 September 2000).

At the time that the murals were created, white British Columbians considered the imagery to be appropriate for their setting. The message respecting Aboriginal peoples that the murals conveyed may have been considered, if anything, liberal. Southwell's granddaughter has reflected:

I do not believe that my grandfather looked at natives as inferior. I do not believe that his paintings were motivated by either racism or colonialist propaganda. He himself was a renegade. He bucked convention and encouraged non-conformity in his children and grandchildren. His cultural and historical perspectives were rarely in synch with public opinion. (Aubin Van Berckel in *Sun*, 22 August 2000).

Indeed, the very inclusion of Aboriginal persons among "the historical qualities necessary for establishment of a civilization," to use the donor's description, may have been innovative. According to Southwell's granddaughter:

At a time when native Indian art was unrecognized and under-appreciated, it was my grandfather who taught me how to distinguish the carvings of the Kwakiutl from those of the Haida, or the Nuh-chal-nuuth[sic]. He explained to me how a bentwood box was made, where argillite came from, and the difference between Coastal and Interior basket weavings. (Aubin Van Berckel in *Sun*, 22 August 2000).

As to how this came about: "He lived and traveled with native guides. He learned their stories and oral traditions." (Aubin Van Berckel in *Sun*, 22 August 2000).

There is some evidence that Southwell made efforts to research the subjects of his paintings. In a newspaper report from the time, Southwell is said to have made a trip to the Clinton to more accurately paint the detail of the courthouse *Justice* scene and used the woodstove that was in the original courthouse as his model. (*Sun*, 28 May 1938) Historian Dr. Martin Segger noted that "the family recalls some binders of papers assembled for Southwell by the Provincial Archives." (*Correspondence*, 28 January 2001) and he is also likely to have used paintings of Vancouver and related

images from the Archives which had been loaned to his mentor Bruce McKelvie. His interest in accuracy can be gleaned from his statement to the press in 1938.

He deems it necessary to cultivate through pictorial representation a true knowledge of our notable events as ocular demonstration, leaves positive impressions on the mind, and it would give the youths of the country courage to achieve, pride in their citizenship, and he claims that murals are the best means to that end. (*Sun*, 28 May 1938)

Some of the controversy around these murals relates to the accuracy of the depiction of Aboriginal women as bare-breasted in the mural entitled *Labour*. The available oral and ethnographic history confirms that there was a diversity of beliefs about clothing practices among Aboriginal peoples in the province. In some cultures, like the Nuu-chah-nulth, ordinary dress for women covered the breasts. In other cultures, including the Straits Salish and the Lekwammen people around Fort Victoria, some evidence available to the panel suggests that ordinary dress in the warmer months did not involve covering the breasts. (Paul Kane, *Wanderings of an Artist*, Toronto: Radisson Society, 1859; reprinted 1925, pp. 144-47; John Kendrick, ed. *The Voyage of Sutil and Mexicana, 1792*, Spokane, Washington: Arthur C. Clark, 1991; Henry Wagner, *Spanish Explorations in the Strait of Juan de Fuca* AMS, 1971, pp. 256, 260; Thomas Manby, *Voyage of H.M.S. Discovery and Chatham: to the Northwest Coast of America, 1791-1827*, Beinecke Library Yale, WA MSS 325, unpaginated; Homer Barnett, *Coast Salish of British Columbia* Eugene: University of Oregon Press, 1955, p. 70.)

As to the accuracy of the event, historical evidence indicates that the Lekwammen were hired to procure pickets to build Fort Victoria, which they brought to the fort site from the Mount Douglas area. There is a more serious question when it comes to the portrayal of women as hewers of wood. In Straits Salish society, as more generally on the Northwest Coast, women's labour included the preservation and trading of fish, as is also indicated in the mural, but not construction or woodwork. The only women who might do this heavy work were women of the slave class. There is evidence that the Lekwammen did hire their slaves out to the fort for construction work but it is doubtful whether Southwell did the kind of systematic research that would be needed to turn up this detail. (British Columbia Archives, A/B/40/D75.4A James Douglas, *Diary of a Trip to Victoria* 1-21 March, 1843; William W. Elmendorf, *Twana Narratives*, Vancouver: UBC Press, 1993, pp. 61-63.)

Each of the other murals depicts an epochal moment in the colonisation of British Columbia: *Courage*, the meeting of George Vancouver and Bodega y Quadra at Friendly Cove to peacefully defuse an international crisis; and *Enterprise*, the landing on Vancouver Island to select a site for Fort Victoria and the building of Fort Victoria

itself. The other mural that has attracted the most protest is the mural *Justice*, which Southwell described as depicting a scene at Clinton. It seems unlikely that Southwell did not have a particular event in mind. The 9 February 1952 *Sun* describes the mural as “primitive court at Clinton” but is not directly quoting Southwell. Another article describes it as an incident “when Judge Begbie and Secretary Pooley visited Clinton to pacify troublesome Indians who threatened war on whites and, by brilliant compromise and fine judgement, their efforts culminated in success” (*Sun* 28 May 1938).

Art historian and historian of the Parliament Buildings Martin Segger suggests, in a 28 January 2001 letter to the panel, that it is a transposition of an incident in 1879 involving the Provincial Indian Commissioner, Lt. Col. Dr. Israel Wood Powell. Segger suggests that the murals may depict the famous scene from a 1874 meeting of Powell (shown in the mural seated in a red tunic) with twelve Clinton area tribes. County Court Judge O'Reilly and his interpreter/recorder were in attendance as Powell listened to and discussed various issues with each of the chiefs, in particular the lack of treaties and inadequate size of land grants. In the newspaper account of this event “Fountain Chief Tsch-lo-ko-sultz” is described as “tall and erect...dressed in a white buckskin coat with fringes, pantaloons of same, leggings and moccasins, his head adorned with a black fox-skin cap and a sword hanging by his side” (*Daily Colonist*, 14 July 1874). The article described the event as taking place outdoors, tents were “gaily decorated with flags.” Many of the elements appear in this scene, although not quite as set out in the newspaper account, and Southwell depicts an indoor scene. However, discussions do seem to focus in the murals on a map or document on the center table.

The Aboriginal men are dressed in formal clothing and, although one has his hands clasped unnaturally behind his back, they are not fettered or bound. The Aboriginal man's stance may be interpreted in a variety of ways, from being a compositional element to balance the design, to indicating that the man is looking down at the paper on the table, to showing a subservient relationship with the other men in the painting. The non-Aboriginal man at the left is holding a gun, an image that can be interpreted as a depiction of coercion. The event appears to be more a meeting than a trial. While it has been suggested that this scene relates to the Tsilqot'in resistance to settlement and the hanging of five Tsilqot'in chiefs at Quesnellemouth, there is no evidence for this and much to the contrary.

Martin Segger believes the four murals stem from a utopian strain in the arts community in the 1930s, that celebrated the coming together of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples to build a new culture in the province. In his view, the mural *Labour* celebrates co-operation between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal; *Courage* a peaceful settlement of disputes at time of warmongering; *Enterprise* the bold and difficult undertaking of the mixed-blood fur trader James Douglas to create a new

Eden; and *Justice* a meeting of interior chiefs with Begbie and Indian Commissioner Powell to hear Aboriginal grievances over the need for treaties. Segger's reading is based on considerable research and may indicate the original intent of the images.

Somewhat less controversial but no less problematic are Southwell's renderings of Aboriginal arts in the murals. The traditional arts of the First Nations of British Columbia at the time of contact and during the early colonial period were well developed and territorially distinguishable. Three of the murals – *Enterprise*, *Courage*, and *Labour* – contain inaccurate images of First Nations sculptural and graphic arts.

Although apparently somewhat familiar with Aboriginal peoples' customs, traditions and habits, Southwell appears to have little or no understanding of the arts of First Nations of British Columbia. Southwell's grand daughter, Aubin Van Berckel, states that, "It was my grandfather who taught me how to distinguish the carvings of the *Kwakiutl* from those of the Haida, or the Nuh'chal'nuuth [sic]" (*Sun*, 22 August 2000). Despite his apparent familiarity with the art, the formalized design structure that characterizes Northwest Coast Aboriginal art is misrepresented in several instances.

For example, *Labour*, which depicts the building of Fort Victoria, shows a paddle being held by an Aboriginal person who is, in all likelihood, of Salish descent. The design field of the paddle, however, has no connection with the historical arts of any of the First Nations of British Columbia and is particularly inappropriate for the Salish. Also, the design details of garments worn by the Aboriginal people in the mural are inaccurate. The Salish peoples of the time would not have worn garments with this type of applied design.

In the scene, *Courage*, which takes place in Nuuchahnulth territory, a number of inaccurate details are included. First Nations people paid great attention to ceremonial garments, and for the occasion illustrated, - the meeting of three nations – people would have carefully chosen the appropriate dress. Yet the decoration of the garment worn by the First Nations person directly behind Quadra is stylistically wrong. Almost awkwardly placed behind the same person is an embarrassingly inappropriate rendering of a ceremonial mask. Masks such as this one are ceremonial objects and statements of ownership, rights and privileges. They are not suited to this type of meeting. In addition, the type and design of the totem pole in the background are inaccurate. Stylistically, the pole is out of context as well. The Nuuchahnulth have a very distinct carving and design style. This is not a Nuuchahnulth pole but appears to be either a poor copy of a Kwakwaka'wakw design or the product of the artist's imagination.

In the scene, *Enterprise*, the type of clothing of the natives in the background appears to be out of place, considering that the scene is in Salish territory. The hats worn by

the Aboriginal people appear to be Nuu-chah-nulth in design. More troubling in this scene is the detail of the garment worn by the Aboriginal person in the left foreground who is helping with the landing of Douglas' boat. Stylistically, the design field of the garment depicted here is not peculiar to any First Nations design style of the past or present.

Southwell was said to have educated himself prior to painting these scenes. Segger stated that: "in terms of subject matter he went to great lengths to obtain accuracy" (*Correspondence*, 28 January 2001). Overlooking the finer detail of Aboriginal arts may appear trivial to some, but these misrepresentations add to the more complex issues of nudity, subservience and dominance that are depicted in these mural paintings. In spite of Southwell's personal sympathies to Aboriginal people, he was still an artist of his time, celebrating the establishment of a European colony and what he considered civilization. As a whole, the murals with their titles glorify the watchwords of the industrial state and the peaceful co-existence of peoples in an idealized colonial relationship.

The second component of murals is the setting. Although now problematic, the murals' location would have made absolute good sense to contemporaries. The murals were consistent with the entire decorative scheme of the Parliament Buildings. From the gilded George Vancouver on the dome, down past the coat of arms celebrating the sun rising over the British Empire, past Sir James Douglas and Judge Matthew Baillie Begbie flanking the ceremonial entrance to the fourteen statues of colonial notables that adorn the outside of the library, the twelve muses and the six busts of western literature's great men, there is only one reference to an Aboriginal person, Chief Maquinna, on the library exterior. Presumably, he is included because of his prominence in the accounts of explorers at Nootka Sound and his hospitality to the Europeans. Without being explicit, these murals, emblems and statuary celebrate the dispossession of Aboriginal people and culture. At the time the murals were produced, the vote, and hence the right to select or participate in the government that the Parliament Buildings housed, was denied to Aboriginal persons and also to persons of Asian descent. Women had the vote, but their numbers in the Legislature were so small as to be mostly irrelevant. In other words, the attitudes of superiority that the murals might be seen to convey in respect to Aboriginal people corresponded to a considerable extent with the body of persons who mostly inhabited the Parliament Buildings.

Today, it is not just the murals' content but their setting that causes concern. The Parliament Buildings are no longer the purview of a self-selected minority of British Columbians. Two Aboriginal persons, Frank Calder and Larry Guno have been elected as Members of the Legislative Assembly. Calder was first elected in 1949 and was subsequently re-elected eight times. Guno was elected in 1986 and served in the House

for one term. Women and persons of diverse backgrounds are no longer the outsiders they once were, either as participants in governance or as visitors. Unlike two generations ago, the Parliament Buildings are now generally accepted as belonging to all people of British Columbia. Thus, it is not surprising that the image and messages respecting Aboriginal people that the murals convey have become contentious. According to Hemas Kla-Lee-Lee-Kla (Bill Wilson) in speaking with the panel, numerous Aboriginal groups have spoken out about the murals over a considerable period of time.

First Nations representatives have expressed feelings of shame, anger, and dismay about the way that Aboriginal people are portrayed in the murals. The women shown with bare breasts and the naked children in the *Courage* mural exude the stereotypical 'savage' image. This demeaning image is much more than a matter of historical accuracy. Media attention has sensationalized the matter of bare breasts, reinforcing the perception that Aboriginal women are being portrayed as sexualized objects. Aboriginal men are depicted in submissive positions. The message that can be extrapolated from these images and their interpretations is that Aboriginal people are inferior and their relationship to explorers and colonists was one of subservience. Nuuchahnulth cultural advisor Ron Hamilton described the depiction of Aboriginal women in the murals as "degrading, insulting and sexually exploitative." The murals perpetuate a stereotypical image of the "squaw." "The paintings bother me and they hurt me." He emphasized how important it is to make the Parliament Buildings a safe place for everyone to enter. "We need to make the Parliament Buildings safe for Aboriginal women and children."

The debate about historical accuracy, the value of the murals as historic art, and the examination of how one is influenced by societal values and attitudes of particular time periods has been an important academic exercise. But the concerns of the First Nations Summit and the chiefs of the Lekwammen people are much more than an academic consideration. For many years, many Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal people have found the image and message of the murals to be not only disturbing, but offensive and hurtful. The value of the art and the historical accuracy of the murals is less important than the hurt that they cause. They may have had a function in their time, but, as hereditary Chief Andy Thomas stated, that time has gone.

It has not only been Aboriginal groups who have been made to feel uncomfortable by the murals. The murals were the focus of a flurry of media attention in 1993 after a number of female Members of Legislative Assembly publicly stated that they were "as concerned as much about the racist undertones as the nudity." (*Monday Magazine*, 4 March 1993). In response, an internal government committee, with representatives from the Royal British Columbia Museum, the Protocol and Events Branch and the

Government Communications Office, was formed in 1993 to review the murals. Although the committee considered adding interpretive plaques to the murals, it recommended to government that no action be taken at that time. Because the murals were painted directly on plaster, removal was not known to be a feasible option. Coverage was also not considered, as the committee had met with conservationists who indicated that any coverage would be seen as "heritage vandalism" (Marc-Andre Ouellette, Director, Protocol and Events Branch, in conversation with Kate Ryan-Lloyd).

Two thirds of a century and two generations later, the goal of Southwell and his contemporaries to turn attention to British Columbia's past remains commendable. Their efforts deserve to be acknowledged within the context of the times in which they worked. As Southwell's granddaughter put it well: "His murals provide a historical record of our province, not only through their content but through the very fact that they exist" (Aubin Van Berckel in *Sun*, 22 August 2000). At the same time, much has changed. British Columbia's society has broadened tremendously, making the murals' content not nearly as coherent with its views as they once were. While the perspective of Southwell and others deserves an important place in our understanding, it is no longer the only, or principal, means by which we perceive the history of this province. While the perspective that is presented in the paintings deserves an important place in our understanding of historical attitudes in the province, it is no longer the lens through which we view the history of British Columbia. Exploration and colonization are now understood as processes that created this province by displacing Aboriginal people. Aboriginal peoples' historic contributions to building British Columbia are now being recognized.



# OPTIONS TO ADDRESS THE CONCERNS RAISED BY FIRST NATIONS

Five options have come to the panel's attention. Each option has advantages, disadvantages and technical considerations.

## I. LEAVE THE MURALS AS THEY ARE.

---

### Advantages:

The main advantage of this solution is that the murals maintain their artistic historical integrity, which involves both the depictions and the placement of the paintings. The Parliament Buildings are left unchanged and uncompromised as a heritage structure. The gift of the murals to the Legislative Assembly is honoured.

### Disadvantages:

The First Nations Summit and the chiefs of the Lekwammen people are adamant in its objections to the murals. Objections were also voiced about the murals in 1993. If the murals are left as they are, objections to their content will continue in the future. Many visitors to the Parliament Buildings may continue to believe that the murals are "accurate" representations of past events and of the role of First Nations people in the province's history. First Nations people will continue to be alienated from the very building that is a symbol of our democratic system and should be a place for all British Columbians, no matter what their cultural origins. The First Nations objections are particularly important during this period of treaty negotiations and efforts to resolve long-standing and contentious land issues in the province.

### Technical Considerations:

None.

## 2. LEAVE THE MURALS AS THEY ARE WITH THE ADDITION OF OTHER MATERIALS.

---

This option proposes the addition of interpretive panels adjacent to or in front of the murals to alert the viewer that these represent a particular view of British Columbia history as reflected through the eyes of an artist in the 1930s and to indicate First Nations concerns about the murals. This option also includes the possibility of inviting First Nations and other artists whose views are not represented in the

iconography and the paintings of the Parliament Buildings to illustrate the lower lobby adjacent to the rotunda with 21<sup>st</sup> century views of British Columbia's heritage.

### Advantages:

This option accepts the thrust of the objections by the First Nations Summit and the chiefs of the Lekwammen people, that the paintings represent a view of British Columbia history that is no longer current. With the addition of a commentary, the murals are interpreted as representing the colonial and racist attitudes of the past and thereby become illustrations of the values of the 1930s. Through interpretative panels the murals become agents for learning about past attitudes and vehicles for imparting current readings of history and current social and cultural values. Option 2 avoids censorship of the art of the 1930s, but it acknowledges the colonial past of the province. The artistic importance of the murals and the heritage value of the Parliament Buildings are not compromised.

One of the possibilities inherent in this option is to incorporate works by First Nations and other artists in the decorative scheme in the room(s) adjacent to the murals. The extant decorative scheme of the buildings would remain intact. By inviting contemporary artists to make the buildings reflect present values it contributes to a 2001 heritage layer. There would be more and varied art works and historic points of view on public view in the Legislature, and groups who are left out of the representations in the buildings would be included and welcomed.

The juxtaposition of the two views of the past -- one a view by a non-Aboriginal artist, clearly identified as a view from the 1930s and a contemporary one by Aboriginal and other artists speaks graphically to reconciliation. Option Two tries to reconcile the legitimate protest of Aboriginal people and the legitimate concerns of the heritage and arts communities. It invites visitors to interpret the murals for themselves, while offering, through interpretive panels, the interpretation of the Summit and the Lekwammen chiefs for all to consider.

### Disadvantages:

This option does not fully meet the demands of the First Nations Summit and the chiefs of the Lekwammen people. To the Summit, the chiefs, and some others the murals will remain offensive even if the message in the murals is disavowed. There will be difficulties in writing the appropriate text to accompany the murals and the words may not be read by the public and may not override the visual impact of the pictures.

If the option to invite contemporary artists to interpret the history of the province is taken up, the physical restrictions of the space dictate that these works be placed in

nearby areas rather than in the rotunda itself. Such a placement in a less prominent spot could be interpreted as a marginalization of the contemporary views. By adding artwork, we take up a conversation, which only continues an old discussion and, by virtue of doing so, acknowledges the murals' message.

#### Technical Considerations:

Interpretative panels could be placed in front of the murals at waist height or they could be mounted on the pillars between the murals. Costs will be involved in a consultative process to produce the explanations of the murals as well in the costs of the panels themselves. If new art works are added, there will be costs for the artists and for a selection process, which should involve a well-advertised, juried competition. The issues the murals raise would need to be part of regular training for the Parliamentary tour guides and a standard text provided for this part of the tour that explains the context of the murals. To balance the message of the murals, the Speaker would want to consider initiating a program of contemporary British Columbia art, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, for the large 'Lower Lobby' immediately adjoining the rotunda.

### 3. ALTER THE MURALS TO COVER UP OFFENDING ASPECTS.

---

#### Advantages:

Versions of the murals continue to be available for public viewing in their original location. The Parliament Buildings are uncompromised as a heritage structure.

#### Disadvantages:

As this report makes clear, there are many aspects of the murals that offend. Covering the breasts of some of the figures with more appropriate garments would not change the perceived overall message of the murals. The message of censorship would be overt. Alteration continues the tradition of painting out the offending titles. It also alters the heritage value of the murals.

#### Technical Considerations:

It would be difficult to make the additions look integral to the original paintings, especially since so much of the murals' surfaces would have to be covered. Costs would include artists' fees and materials.

#### 4. COVER UP THE MURALS.

---

##### Advantages:

Covering the murals without adding a new decorative scheme will not harm the murals if done correctly. They could be uncovered if restoration was deemed advisable at a later date. Leaving the walls undecorated will return the building to its original condition. If the murals are covered and new decoration added, there would be an opportunity to introduce contemporary works in a prominent place in the Parliament Buildings. Whether the artists are Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal, or a combination of both, this will be a strong message that the Legislative Assembly supports arts and culture in British Columbia.

##### Disadvantages:

The new art works themselves are likely to be controversial in some way, especially since they will be the subjects of considerable scrutiny. That the murals are still in place, although obscured, carries the implication that the offending pictures may reappear at a future date. The message of censorship would be overt. Coverage also compromises the heritage structure of the Parliament Buildings. Heritage and other community groups may be offended.

##### Technical Considerations:

Covering the murals will involve technical expertise and associated costs. New art works will have to be selected and paid for, unless the walls are left undecorated.

#### 5. REMOVE THE MURALS.

---

##### Advantages:

This option follows the directive of the First Nations Summit and the chiefs of the Lekwammen people. If removed successfully, the paintings can be preserved. If a new location is found for them in a more suitable context, they will be available for study and critique. Removal also sends a strong message that the Legislative Assembly is sensitive to, and responds to, material that is considered offensive.

##### Disadvantages:

Media reports in the *Times-Colonist*, the *Globe and Mail* and other newspapers already demonstrate that the removal of the murals will not be well received by a significant and vocal part of the non-Aboriginal community. The heritage community, educators, artists, and others will raise legitimate concerns about the removal of the murals as

they have done when removal was considered in the past. Others, who do not understand the details of the debate will raise potentially inflammatory objections. The whole event may create a controversy that will receive media attention within and without the province and may make reconciliation and redress more, rather than less, difficult.

According to Ian Thom and Martin Segger, the two experts in the art history of the province consulted by the panel, the murals are rare and possibly unique examples of the mural art of pre-World War II British Columbia, when murals were an important public art form. Southwell, despite his current obscurity, was a major artist of his time in the province - one of the very few professional artists the province supported. The removal of the murals would be the removal of his most prominent work from the province's most prominent heritage building and a major loss to the art history of the province.

Because murals have two aspects - their locations and depictions – their character will be altered if they are moved from their original site. The murals may be damaged or even destroyed if the removal process does not proceed as anticipated. Where they are moved to also presents a problem. Out of context, the murals will be gigantic slabs of plaster which will be hard to store and expensive to redisplay. There is no obvious institution who would take them on and it is possible - even probable- that they would languish in storage. Both Thom and Segger argued strongly against the removal of the murals.

Removal of the murals may be seen as a statement of censorship with respect to the art, the artist, and the view of history that it projects. It is an extraordinary event to destroy or remove art or books, or architecture as the views they represent go out of fashion and history generally does not remember such occasions well. If we remove our public art as it goes out of fashion or becomes a public controversy, British Columbia will never have a heritage that is centuries old.

The cost of removing the murals is estimated at \$280,000, exclusive of storage and reinstallation, according to a conservator contracted by the Office of the Speaker. The Legislative Assembly may be criticized for spending a significant amount of money on the removal of the murals. This money could instead be invested in creative activities to bring 21st century perspectives into the Parliament Buildings.

### Technical Considerations:

This is an expensive undertaking which involves removing a wall in the Parliament Buildings. Considerable preparations will be necessary. There is no guarantee that the process will be successful and that the murals and the fabric of the building will be

undamaged. Unless a suitable venue can be found for the paintings, there is danger of their being damaged or destroyed after they have been removed from the walls.

## RECOMMENDATION

The panel is unanimous that the present situation is unacceptable. The murals have been a point of controversy for some time and clearly offend the First Nations Summit and the chiefs of the Lekwammen people. This is a public building and concerns raised by a significant portion of the Province's people need to be taken into account and addressed.

The difficult question is how to reconcile the legitimate and very understandable demands of the First Nations Summit Task Group and the chiefs of the Lekwammen people with the deeply held feelings of many other British Columbians that the murals are inherent to the structure and the spirit of the Parliament Buildings as a heritage structure reflecting change over time, and that the murals are significant pieces in the history of public art in British Columbia. The murals' location in the Parliament Buildings invests them with enormous significance for many groups across British Columbia with conflicting ideas. The panel recognizes that there is no way to placate every one. The panel recognizes there is no resolution that will please all constituencies; indeed several panel members found themselves pulled in different directions by the arguments for the various options.

After a lengthy and detailed consideration the panel came, however, to a unanimous recommendation. The panel unanimously recommends Option 5, that the murals be removed with the proviso that they not be destroyed in the process. In making its recommendation the panel highlights the two key aspects of murals: content and location.

The murals' content is patently capable of creating more offense among some groups of British Columbians than others. Those least affected are in general more likely to find nothing wrong and to point to the strong artistic and heritage arguments for leaving the murals in their place. The panel has fully considered these arguments and accepts their merits. In the view of the panel these merits are overridden by the principle that the "people's house" for all British Columbians ought not to be the location for works of art that cause offense and shame to any part of the people of the province. We heard and felt the emotional pain and hurt that generations of Aboriginal people have felt from the stereotypical and demeaning images portrayed in the murals. Aboriginal youth as well as adults have indicated that they feel offended by the murals' images of Aboriginal people. The message that they take away is that Aboriginal people continue to be discounted and disrespected. Can we or the Members of the Legislative Assembly continue to perpetuate emotional pain upon current and future generations of Aboriginal people by leaving the murals where they are?

If the murals depicted any other portion of the province's population in a way that that group found as offensive, our recommendation would be the same. As British Columbians, every one of us has the right to enter the Parliament Buildings without having to see ourselves portrayed in a way we feel is insulting. The panel members believe that respecting the dignity of a people portrayed in a public building is the most important ethical principle here.

The argument that the sexualization of women's breasts was introduced by Europeans and that Aboriginal women may well have gone bare-breasted in certain circumstances can be supported by the written observations of early European observers such as Paul Kane, but it conflates the events depicted and their depiction. The murals are, and were intended to be, allegorical representations rather than realistic depictions of actual events. The images of bare-breasted women in the paintings, like the images of the heroic European males shown in them, carry a contemporary message of inequality between races. For all of the artist's personal sympathy with Aboriginal people, which likely led to their depiction in the murals at all, Southwell, like all of us, was a creature of his times, caught up in the sensibilities around him.

The panel stresses that, in the controversy surrounding the murals, their location is a more important factor than their content. The Parliament Buildings are not an art gallery with a specialized audience and function. They are, rather, the centre of our system of governance representing all the people of the province. No one should feel excluded here.

Moreover, however important the four murals might be to the structure of the Parliament Buildings and to its heritage value, they are not integral to it. The Parliament Buildings and its central rotunda existed for three decades before one individual decided to give the murals as a gift and then to arrange for their creation. The Parliament Buildings and its central rotunda will continue to exist as a heritage structure without the four murals, whether or not they are replaced or the spaces returned to their previous condition.

At the same time, the panel is very sympathetic to the perspective that "the murals are works of art, not historical records, and should be judged as such". The panel believes strongly that the four murals should continue to exist as works of art and for that reason recommends their removal to another location rather than their being covered up. The murals are an important reminder of British Columbia art and attitudes during the interwar years. George Southwell's career in British Columbia spanned half a century and deserves to be remembered and, moreover, to be respected for its contributions to the artistic life of the province. The production of murals in British Columbia has been studied little, if at all, and far too few examples survive. Murals

must be considered both in terms of their content and their location. While a significant part of a mural's production is lost by removal from its location, another part, its content, survives. In this regard, the option of covering up the murals would achieve nothing as they would no longer be accessible as to their content or to their setting.

Aboriginal people, women and persons of diverse cultural backgrounds are now full citizens of British Columbia, which is very different to the norms of earlier times. This fundamental change has to be recognized. As conservator Cheryle Harrison has written: "It is a propitious time for a welcoming of the First Nations Peoples as a visual and historical presence within the Parliament Building, the symbolic representation of democracy and the people of Canada" (*Proposal*, 10 September 2000).

There are important strategic, as well as substantive, reasons for the Legislative Assembly to remove the murals. To do so is a symbol of good faith in the British Columbia that is coming into being. The removal of the murals gives a signal to Aboriginal people, and also to women and others, that the exclusionary attitudes which spawned them have indeed been left behind in the twentieth century.

Because the Parliament Buildings sit on the traditional territory of the Songhees and Esquimalt peoples, the panel considers it essential that the Legislative Assembly respectfully inform Chief Robert Sam and hereditary Chief Andy Thomas on any decision made about the murals.

The panel also considers it very important for the Legislative Assembly to use this opportunity to develop a critique of the Parliament Buildings as a whole. Not just the murals, the entire decorative scheme of the Parliament Buildings depicts a colonial view of Aboriginal people that is no longer current. The murals primarily depict and celebrate an idealized colonialism. At best Aboriginal people are not depicted as playing a prominent role in the past and, at worst, their acquiescence to the process of colonialism is implied. The buildings were designed and built at a time when the displacement of Aboriginal people by Euro-Canadians was something that was celebrated. From the gilded statue of George Vancouver on the top to the statues of Matthew Baillie Begbie and James Douglas guarding the ceremonial entrance the buildings celebrate imperial expansion and proclaim the superiority of European civilization over the indigenous. The time has come to move ahead in a sensitive and considered way to confront the buildings' colonial character so as to make visitors and others aware of the story that the Parliament Buildings tell through interpretative panels and changes to the scripts of the tour guides. The panel also suggests that the Speaker and Legislative Assembly Management Committee consider inviting

submissions from all British Columbians for an ongoing program of inserting contemporary art into the legislature. The contemporary art would make a statement about where British Columbia is today and perhaps where it aspires to be in the future. Contemporary art could also begin to balance the buildings existing statuary and decorations, which made such a statement for British Columbia in the 1890s.

It is of the first importance that the Legislative Assembly take ownership of whatever decision is made. The reasons that the First Nations Summit Task Group, the chiefs of the Lekwammen people, and the panel find the murals unacceptable as they currently present themselves must be understood. Otherwise, much of the point for effecting change is lost. The government and its opposition represent the people of British Columbia, and the Parliament Buildings are the peoples' building. The legislators are responsible for the message that they want the Parliament Buildings to convey and the extent to which they want the building to welcome all the people of British Columbia. The legislators are accountable for their stewardship of the Parliament Buildings and thereby must be accountable, and feel themselves accountable, for whatever decision is made concerning the murals within the buildings. The panel can recommend, but action must come from the legislators themselves, through the persons designated by them, in their capacity as the representatives of the people - all the people - of British Columbia.

## APPENDIX: SOUTHWELL THE ARTIST

Most of the information about Southwell and his career, as summarized by Segger in the report, comes from interviews or conversations with him, as opposed to any major biography or his inclusion in art or other books on British Columbia.

Born in Spain in 1865 during his parents' visit there from England, George Southwell studied art at the Kensington School of Art in London and Slade School. He made his living as an artist through several means. As well as painting numerous portraits and designing wall paper, his "murals and ecclesiastical decorations adorn[ed] a number of churches and public buildings in England" (Typescripts, British Columbia Archives, MS. 1, Box 25). Southwell once explained that, having already lost the sight of one eye, he turned away from doing portraits to "industrial themes for inspiration" (*Sun*, 18 October 1952).

Southwell was one of the artists selected to decorate the British Section of the Paris Exposition in 1888 and chief artist to decorate the British Section of the Brussels Exposition in 1908. Southwell evoked his "marvelously realistic" mural done in 1908, 240 x 8 feet high, as "showing miners at work, picks on backs, women wheeling barrows of coal, with masts of ships in the distance as background" (*Sun*, 18 October 1952). That mural, and perhaps others, foreshadowed his later murals in the Parliament Buildings.

Various explanations exist as to how Southwell got to British Columbia. It was, according to an interview he gave, because his sixteen-year-old son "wanted to become a logger, that, in 1910 in his mid-forties, Southwell left his wife and six children in England to head off to Vancouver. In another version, Southwell's granddaughter wrote that "he came on holiday to check out the tracts of land that he held as a result of trading on the London Stock Exchange" (Aubin Van Berckel in *Sun*, 22 August 2000). A third comes from his longtime patron, journalist Bruce McKelvie. Writing about Southwell in 1930, McKelvie explained that, "suffering a series of heavy financial losses, he decided to come to Canada" (Typescript, British Columbia Archives, MS. 1, Box 25).

Whatever the impetus, Southwell decided to stay. "Filled with a naive ambition to make his living as a portrait painter," he got a studio in downtown Vancouver and "built himself a shack for his family on Shaughnessy Heights" (*Province*, 27 April 1946; *Sun*, 20 July 1950). The commissions did not come as expected, and, reflecting back in 1950, Southwell claimed that "Vancouver didn't have any art 40 years ago - and didn't want any" (*Sun*, 20 July 1950). In his granddaughter's version, Southwell soon built his family a house on property he held at Half Moon Bay near Pender

Harbour, where within the year he and his older sons were logging. About the beginning of the First World War, Southwell's wife and remaining children arrived to a house built in Vancouver at the corner of Beach and Pacific Avenues, the Half Moon Bay house becoming a summer residence (Aubin Van Berckel in *Sun*, 22 August 2000).

Southwell engaged in a variety of activities. He once described how "when the portrait business went aglimmering, he and the late John Innes linked up with the government of the day and began painting large murals" and also illustrating books together (*Sun*, 20 July 1950; *Sun*, 18 October 1952). Like Southwell, Innes (1864-1941) painted British Columbia historical scenes, including the much-reproduced evocation of Governor James Douglas taking the oath of office at Fort Langley in 1858. McKelvie wrote in 1930 how Southwell "engaged in other pursuits for a number of years, and then went south to California where he was engaged in mural designing and painting; among other works designing the decorations for Pantages theatres" (Typescript, British Columbia Archives, MS. 1, Box 25). One of Southwell's murals decorated the dining room of the former Devonshire Hotel in Vancouver (*Sun*, 28 May 1938).

Bruce McKelvie was Southwell's patron at least from 1923. McKelvie (1889-1960) was a prolific British Columbia journalist and writer whose output ranged from textbooks to historical novels to innumerable newspaper and magazine articles. Much of it was intended to encourage interest in the province's history through giving it a distinctly romantic flavour.

In the fall of 1923, McKelvie was one of the backers behind a project initiated by the Native Sons of British Columbia, a fraternal organization dedicated to giving British Columbia a history, to commission Southwell to paint portraits of the "Old Timers". Painter John Innes recommended Southwell to McKelvie as "a man with the colour sense, powerful drawing and mastery of technique" suitable "when this work for the Native Sons is wanted" (John Innes to Bruce McKelvie, 9 August 1923, British Columbia Archives, MS.1 Box 5). It is unclear how far along this project got to create a "pioneer gallery of fame." Southwell was supposed to portray in oils "several hundred" of "the hardy trail-blazers of the west" so as to "give British Columbia its birthright of tradition." The plan was that the Native Sons would pay half the price of each picture with relatives of each person portrayed picking up the other half. The Native Sons hoped to house Southwell's portraits in "a replica of an old Hudson's Bay log stockade" to be located "on the northeast shore of Lost Lagoon in Stanley Park, so that it would be seen by all entering that beauty resort" (*Sun*, 16 September 1923). Southwell's first portrait was of early Burrard Inlet settler John Morton (*Sun*, 23 November 1923), but what happened thereafter has not been determined. McKelvie also used Southwell to illustrate the school text he published in 1926, *Early History of the Province of British Columbia*, and perhaps other books or newspaper articles.

McKelvie described how, in 1930 or 1931, “I was drafted by the provincial government to reorganize the Department of Information” (*Province*, 14 January 1956). McKelvie later wrote former Premier S. F. Tolmie how “I was the Director of Publicity and Information for the provincial government, of which you were Prime Minister.” (4 December 1934, British Columbia Archives, MS. 1, Box 6). The Provincial Bureau of Information was established in the Department of Finance (Marjorie C. Holmes, *Publications of the Government of British Columbia, 1871-1947*, Victoria, King’s Printer, 1950). The fullest statement of McKelvie’s position, from Southwell’s perspective, comes from an interview Southwell gave in 1952:

Mr. Southwell illustrated for Bruce McKelvie, head of the Publicity Bureau of the provincial government. McKelvie had the happy idea that painted pictures sent to different countries to advertise British Columbia would have better results than photos. Southwell got the job of provincial artist and once again traveled through the province. “A government secretary usually traveled with me,” Southwell recalled. “I was supplied with letters to the Indian agents. Often I was in the care of the provincial police. I traveled in the Okanagan, and in the Cariboo as far north as Soda Creek and Williams Lake. I suppose I painted more than two hundred scenes. They were sent all over the world. I’ve been told a painting of mine has been seen in Siam.”...Southwell's historical murals, completed while he was government artist, may be seen in the Parliament, Victoria. (*Sun*, 18 October 1952)

It was while McKelvie was working for the provincial government that he became involved with Provincial Secretary, S.L. Howe, over the murals project. McKelvie’s papers in the British Columbia Archives contain three letters on the subject from February 1933 (British Columbia Archives, MS. 1, Box 4). The first is from George Southwell to S. L. Howe, stating that “I have now completed the four murals that you so kindly donated.” Southwell added that “they would be improved by being gone over” and “enriched in colour” since “they will probably last many years after both the donor and the artist have passed away.” There was a difficulty. It was “Alas! Impossible in my present financial position – I am in debt to my hotel for the means of hanging in there four months.” Southwell implored: “Can you do anything to help me out? Or do you think your fellow ministers might help – after all it is public work. And under normal circumstances would be rewarded. But these are not normal circumstances and I will be well satisfied if I get out of this position with honour.” Southwell asked if Howe would use his “good office” to get him “on the staff of the House painters” so he could finish “the decoration of the building – at little expense to the government.” Howe was incensed with “the tenor” of the letter and sent it off to McKelvie with a covering note stating: “As you have had to do with the business end of this proposition, I will continue to leave it in your hands.” McKelvie responded to Howe,

praising the murals as “superior to any other panels of a similar character in the Dominion of Canada.” In comparison with twelve murals just completed for the Los Angeles Public Library, McKelvie described the murals as being:

1. Based on the structure of the building, especially on the basic lines of the rotunda – a circle within a square.
2. The historical subjects, while treated decoratively, are correct, and are especially in spirit, British Columbian; and in no sense do they owe anything to European influences - or indeed to any foreign influences.
3. In colour, tone and harmony they are in keeping with the floor, walls and details of the rotunda.
4. In composition, colour and rhythm they are superb and will bear comparison with any panels of similar type.

McKelvie reminded Howe that Innes had been paid \$10,000 for each of eight pictures he had done for the University of British Columbia, also arranged through McKelvie’s good offices, and “under other circumstances the cost of those panels [in the Parliament Buildings] would have been from \$7,500 to \$10,000.” Clearly attempting to shame Howe into paying Southwell’s living expenses, McKelvie told him how “I whipped the hat around and got enough money to provide him with one or two meals a day in a Chinese restaurant” and he and fellow journalist, Bruce Hutchinson, would, if they could afford it, “pay for his room as well.” McKelvie asserted that “the government has not spent a five cent piece in effecting permanent decorations within the building...that would endure for hundreds of years” but has been willing to leave “blank spaces” in “the dingy interior of the buildings.” McKelvie must have left his position with the provincial government about this time, for he later recalled how he “after 12 months took over the managing editorship of the *Victoria Colonist*” (*Province*, 14 January 1956).

Southwell's artistic output over the years had various destinations. He once explained how his works "were sent to Canada House, to Australia, India and other parts of the world to advertise the attractions of this province" (*Sun*, 20 July 1950). He told, another time, how many of them were "acquired by the British Columbia government, presented to distinguished visitors, reproduced in booklet form or placed in government buildings" (*Province*, 27 April 1946). Several were, according to Southwell, "published in book form "from the presses of the King's Printer, Victoria" (*Sun*, 28 May 1938). The British Columbia Archives, according to its web site, holds sixteen of Southwell's works: portraits of the Prince of Wales and future Edward VIII (192?), Thomas Dufferin Pattullo (1934), James Strange (1936), Simon Fraser Tolmie (193?), Daniel Harmon (193?), William Fraser Tolmie (n.d.), historical depictions of

the first Colony of Vancouver Island Legislative Assembly in 1856 (1947) and a fur brigade in the Okanagan (n.d.); and views of Britannia Beach (194?), Mount Baker (194?), Trail smelter (194?), *HMS Repulse* in Vancouver Harbour (n.d.), and four unidentified mountain landscapes (1947 and n.d.).

Southwell stated in one interview that in about 1935 he "retired at the age of 70 from government service" (*Sun*, 1 February 1952). Another time he told how in 1950 he was still "working for the government" (*Sun*, 20 July 1950). Southwell continued to have an attachment to McKelvie. In 1946, Southwell illustrated McKelvie's *Maquinna the Magnificent* and the next year his *Fort Langley: Outpost of Empire*. As late as 1952, Southwell was still painting in his downtown Vancouver studio "with young people coming to take advantage of his lectures and demonstrations" (*Sun*, 10 October 1972). For a time he had a weekly open house, mostly selling scenic views (*Sun*, 20 July 1950). The art exhibition held at the Vancouver Art Gallery to commemorate BC's 1958 centennial contained one Southwell painting, entitled *War Canoes at Fort Hardy*, painted in 1945 and owned privately (no. 177 in the exhibit catalogue, *100 Years of British Columbia Art*). Southwell died in 1961, at the age of 96, at his Half Moon Bay house (Aubin Van Berckel in *Sun*, 22 August 2000).