

A BRIEF COMMENTARY ON PHOTOGRAPHY OF LACROSSE

The following paper was written by Dave Stewart-Candy, who is the author of *Old School Lacrosse* (oldschoollacrosse.wordpress.com) and a member of the board of directors for the Canadian Lacrosse Hall of Fame and responsible for acquisitions and archives.

Over the years, perhaps the most viewed and shared image on *Old School Lacrosse* is the photograph labelled as MONTREAL vs TORONTO, 1864, said to be the FIRST INSTANTANEOUS SNAPSHOT ever taken.

This photograph print resides in the archival collection of the Canadian Lacrosse Hall of Fame as item CLHOF X994.29. The hall has no documentation of how and when this image ended up in its collection, although X994 would imply 1994 as the year it was first noted in any ascension records by curators or archivists, records which are now unfortunately lost.



Since publication of the original post in June 2016, some further details and information surrounding this image have surfaced that both debunk claims as well as confirm some factual knowledge about this very intriguing and unique photograph. Lots of questions have also arisen during that time as well – because if the claims are indeed true, then its nature and value goes beyond the history of the sport into the realm of photographic history itself.

Recent correspondence with colleagues in Australia (John Nolan) and Ontario (Dan Bowyer) regarding this photograph and its historic claim sparked this author to revisit this topic and re-visit the photograph anew from the start.

During the research into verifying the factual nature this image, four aspects need to be taken into account:

- 1) the *photographic technology* used in the era
- 2) the involvement of *Archie Macnaughton* with verifying the August 1864 claim

- 3) the *location* of the image
- 4) *newspaper reporting* on the match in question

PHOTOGRAPHIC TECHNOLOGY

Crucial to the phrase “first instantaneous snapshot” are the photographic processes used during the 19th Century and exposure times required by cameras to produce an image from moving subjects – in this case, lacrosse players at play.

Advancement in photographic technology was haphazard while imagery development costs and complexity limited access in the photographic medium to professionals until the arrival of George Eastman’s Kodak box camera patented in 1888. Suddenly photography was made available to the amateur masses.

Shutter speeds on models prior to the Kodak camera had reached 1/50 sec speed by 1870, fast enough for outdoor photography although still slow enough that moving objects, like people walking, or running in a lacrosse game, would appear blurred. That was a vast improvement from the start of the 1860s where exposure speed was anywhere from 20 to 60 seconds – which limited photography to still portraits. However, to show someone walking with no blur, a shutter speed of 1/250 sec is needed; to freeze a running object, such as a running lacrosse player, then a shutter speed of 1/500 sec would then be required.

There were some experimental cameras back in the 1870s that could shoot 1/1000, but 1/50 was generally the most advanced available well into the 1920s - and what was available in 1864 would have been slow(er). Another factor that we cannot know, is what type of film speed (ISO) would have been used in the camera. Slower film would require less movement / longer exposure.

With this knowledge in mind, for such an action shot to be produced in 1864, either the photographer (Who is unknown) had access to some rare, ground-breaking equipment or the image was taken later than the date claimed.

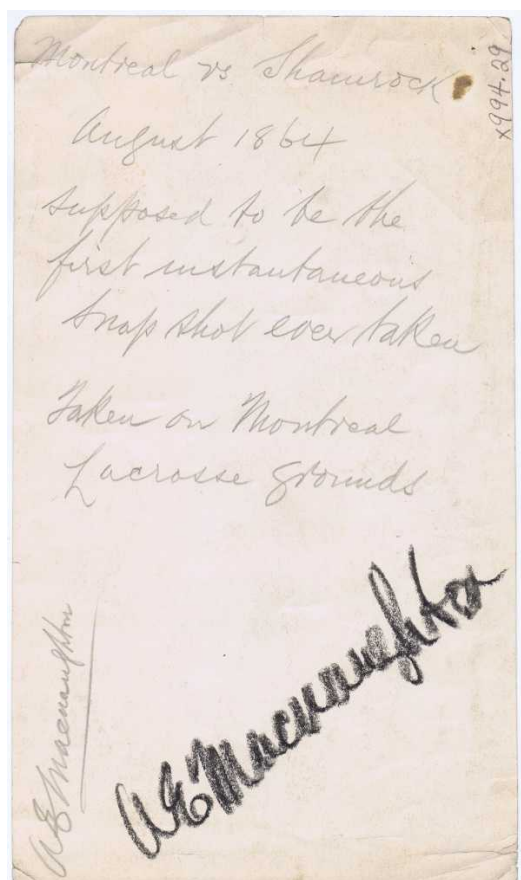
The most popular photographic methods used in the 1860s and 1870s prior to the Kodak camera was the tintype process – which has low light sensitivity and the exposure times can be anywhere from 3 to 8 seconds, if not longer for sharper image results – and the albumen silver process – which required exposure times of 5 to 15 minutes. Regardless which process was used, if this photograph was indeed from the 1860s, everyone would have needed to stand motionless as we see no movement blur whatsoever appear amongst the players’ images. Notice how most of the players’ sticks do not appear, too thin an item to be picked up at long distance with a short exposure. We do know the subject matter was indeed a lacrosse game due to the upright goal posts matching what were used back then, as well as one or two faint hints of a lacrosse stick appearing.

Keep in mind the typewritten text that was attached to the bottom of the photograph was obviously added later and not contemporary – as typewriters were not invented until 1867 and did not become commercially and readily available until 1873.

ARCHIE MACNAUGHTON

Archie Macnaughton [1861-1937] was an individual who at some point came into contact with the photograph to verify the nature of its image. He was born in Montréal and was one of the first nationally-acclaimed, ‘star’ lacrosse players to emerge in the 1880s before relocation to the Pacific Coast in 1891-1892 range, where he lived for the remainder of his life.

Having seen and handled the actual photographic print of this photo in the hall's collection, this author found the paper stock much too modern for 1860-1900s photography – which was usually printed on heavy firm card stock. Macnaughton's print must have been reproduced somehow much later than the image's original creation. Macnaughton died in 1937, so we do know the photograph print dates no later than his death, as it contains his handwriting and signature on the back of the print.



Macnaughton would have been much too young to have observed and recalled any specific details of such a game in 1864 first hand, nor any reason at that tender age to possess such a rare photograph of any sort. Therefore he must have received the image second-hand and been told verbally in passing the nature of the photograph image – and this is where human failures of memory-details can easily enter the picture (excuse the pun), because the original creator of the photograph, plus anyone else who may have possessed it prior to Macnaughton coming into contact with it at some point, could easily forget date details. Macnaughton was quite well known in lacrosse circles both in the East and in the West later in life, 1880's onwards, so he would have been a natural recipient or caretaker of such an item. But not in the 1860's or 1870's before he played the sport. If this image were produced in 1864, it would have taken some years if not decades to find its way into Archie Macnaughton's hands.

We also do not know what the photograph's fate would have been in the years between Macnaughton's passing in 1937 and the establishment of the hall of fame in the 1960's. The photograph must have passed through at least three sets of hands (The photographer, Macnaughton, and the unknown person who donated the image to the hall of fame), if not many more, to find its way into the hall's collection at some point prior to 1994. We do not even know if this photo print was ever owned by Macnaughton or simply shown to him for verification.

Of course, there is the possibility that the image claims could all be downright fake or embellishment. The sport's early days are full of misreported and embellished

events. Could this photograph have been taken, say in the 1870's, 1880's, or early 1890's, but then later passed off to Macnaughton (or passed off by Macnaughton) to be from August 1864? Possible, yes – but Macnaughton's character over the years reads to be one highly respected and honourable enough to likely preclude any outright false or deceptive claims – although lapses in memory are very possible indeed. It is highly doubtful Macnaughton would deliberately make up any stories about the image, but he could have been told incorrect information when the photograph was shown or passed along to him, or himself making an inaccurate guess as to its nature. The most logical line of thinking is this image was shown to Macnaughton decades after its creation, with him still very much a living connection back to those early Montréal days of the sport, for his personal assessment regarding details about the image.

LOCATION

There was an 'old-timer recollection' article printed in the *Montréal Gazette* dated December 26, 1959 that mentioned how the Montréal Lacrosse Grounds were sold in 1887 (although reports of games played there persist a few years beyond), and lacrosse then relocated to the Westmount Athletic grounds where Montréal AAA played. This same article identifies the location of the Montréal Lacrosse Grounds in what is now downtown Montréal – between Montagues, Sherbrooke, St. Catherines, and Mackay Streets – a location that was also known locally back in the day as Phillips Field.

The modern Westmount Athletic Grounds are in fact bordered by a line of old row homes at one end of the playing field – which at first glance does seem to match somewhat, but not exactly, the buildings that appear in the photograph's background. The first lacrosse game played at Westmount Grounds was in 1889, so that would discount the 1864 claim if Westmount were the actual location. The term 'Montréal Lacrosse Grounds' did get used in newspaper reporting for both the downtown Phillips Field site and then later for the Westmount Grounds, as the latter was the home field for the Montréal Amateur Athletic Association lacrosse team. The same team, which coincidentally, Archie Macnaughton was a member between 1882 and 1891.

However, in the collection of the McCord Museum is a team photograph dated from the 1870's which was taken at Phillips Field, and the background detail appearing in this image, namely the row homes and fencing, matches up almost precisely with our photograph in question. Until the 1890s, Sherbrooke Street (one of the boundaries of the Montréal Lacrosse Grounds) would have been regarded as the edge of the city – and the area surrounding Phillips Field does fit well with such a rustic location.

Between the two locations, this author believes the location of the photograph is Phillips Field, which became the Montréal Lacrosse Grounds, and would therefore book-end the imagery creation date no later than 1887-1890 range. With so many doubts and questions about authenticity, it is nice to see some facts that do seem to align accurately with some of the claim – namely, the location.

NEWSPAPER REPORTS

Back in this era of the sport, newspapers were focused first and foremost on local events and issues – and sporting events of practically all calibres received mention in the press. Thus, it is safe to assume that such an important, inter-city match-up between "Montreal vs Toronto" would be reported in the Montréal press. After the famous 1860 match played for the Prince of Wales, the next reported mention of any lacrosse games played in Montréal is not until 1867. It is safe to assume a game

played in 1864 would have been reported by the press – but no such mention can be found.

George Beers is credited for codifying the first rules for lacrosse – either in 1860 in a now-lost publication called “*The Game of Lacrosse*”, written under his nom-de-plume ‘Goal-Keeper’, or in June 1867, which later became the basis of his book “*Lacrosse: the National Game of Canada*” published in 1869. In his latter, famous publication, Beers alludes how the sport dried up in Montréal between 1860 and 1867. One would think a match, if played in August 1864, would have been known and noted by Beers – and yet again, no such recollection is made by him.

One glaring contradiction the photograph contains is the typewritten text “MONTREAL vs TORONTO” versus Macnaughton’s notation “Montreal vs Shamrocks” on the back – the Shamrocks being another famous Montréal lacrosse club. Any such Montréal-Toronto inter-city game would have drawn the attention of the newspapers (as well as George Beers in his writing), but the earliest press about any clubs from Toronto is 1867 range. Meanwhile there were a number of Montréal-Shamrocks matches played from 1870 onwards – for example, the June 18, 1870 match “for the championship of Canada”. Macnaughton writes of “August 1864” – but so far, no mention of any lacrosse games of any sort in 1864 Montréal newspapers has turned up in searches.

It is possible the image was staged for the camera – as there appears to be no audience whatsoever, apart from one shadowy figure along the right fence line, observing this match from the sidelines of the playing area. No spectators would be a rather odd occurrence for any arranged match, which would be expected to draw some sort of crowd. Was this simply a scrimmage or practice? The 1870 team photo in the McCord Stewart collection (item MP-0000.2897 shown below) also shows no observing crowd apart from three or four youth who also made their way into the photograph alongside the team. Some detail differences between the two photos rules out the images were taken on the same day or around the same time – namely clothing worn, as well as a bush or tree and some clutter along the fence line corner which appears in the 1864 photo but not the later 1870 team photo.



CONCLUSION

Previously this author felt the image dated from 1880-1895 range (possibly 1894, thinking 9 and 6 got mistaken in the retelling), however with further investigation and re-assessment of the four framing boundaries described above, 1870-1887 range now seems more plausible – although with the same serious doubts about its August 1864 origin claim.

With all written above considered, this author would like to think and believe it was from one of the 1870 matches between Montréal Club and Montréal Shamrocks, but in the absence of further facts to back up that date, it would be simply guesswork and wishful thinking. We will likely never know the true nature of this unique, incredibly fascinating lacrosse (and incredibly fascinating photographic) image.

If readers have any input or insight to lend on this topic, *Old School Lacrosse* would love to hear from you.