



**Art Gallery of Ontario**  
**Musée des beaux-arts de l'Ontario**

**E.P. Taylor Research Library & Archives**

**Description & Finding Aid:**  
**Thoreau MacDonald Collection**  
**CA OTAG SC104**

Amy Marshall Furness

Gary Fitzgibbon, 2013

## Thoreau MacDonald collection

### Dates of creation:

1933–1979

### Extent:

1 portfolio  
2 v. of drawings  
21 p. of textual records  
4 prints

### Biographical sketch:

Thoreau MacDonald (1901–1989) was a Canadian artist, book illustrator and art editor. Son of Harriet Joan Lavis and Group of Seven painter J.E.H. MacDonald, he was born outside Toronto and named for American transcendentalist author Henry David Thoreau (1817–1862). Largely self-taught, Thoreau MacDonald worked with his father to develop his artistic ability. His prints and drawings are chiefly in black and white owing to colour blindness. He never married.

Thoreau MacDonald's working career was spent for the most part at the Ryerson Press and *Canadian Forum* magazine, for which he produced hundreds of drawings and linocuts. In 1933 he became a founding member of the Canadian Group of Painters. He was especially regarded for his prints and drawings of subjects from nature. In the late 1930s he founded the Woodchuck Press in Thornhill, Ont. to produce bookplates and labels along with illustrated publications. Thoreau MacDonald died in Toronto in 1989. His work is in the collections of the Art Gallery of Ontario, Hart House at the University of Toronto, the McMichael Collection and the National Gallery of Canada.

### Custodial history:

Materials now constituting the Thoreau MacDonald collection were acquired beginning in 1970 when Sybille Pantazzi, librarian of the Art Gallery of Ontario, purchased the page layouts for *Maria Chapdelaine*.

Edmund Robert Hunter, author of *Thoreau MacDonald* (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1943), purchased the portfolio of drawings for H.D. Thoreau's *Walden* from MacDonald after 1936, lent it to the Art Gallery of Ontario in 1988 and donated it in 2007.

Correspondence to Thomas Roche Lee was purchased from him at an unknown date. Other correspondence was transferred from staff of the Art Gallery of Ontario to the Library and Archives.

### Scope and content:

Collection consists chiefly of illustrative works by Canadian graphic artist Thoreau MacDonald, including a portfolio of drawings for an unpublished illustrated edition of Henry David Thoreau's study *Walden* and a volume of layouts for the novel *Maria Chapdelaine* by French author Louis Hémon. Collection also includes some correspondence.

#### *Contains series:*

1. Some designs for H.D. Thoreau's *Walden*
2. Page layouts for *Maria Chapdelaine*
3. Correspondence

### Notes:

#### *Source of title proper:*

Title of the collection is based on its contents.

#### *Restrictions on access:*

Open. Access to Special Collections is by appointment only. Please contact the reference desk for more information.

#### *Terms governing use and reproduction / publication:*

Material in this collection is in the public domain. Permission of the Art Gallery of Ontario is required for publication.

*Accruals:*

No further accruals are expected.

*Related material:*

The AGO Research Library & Archives holds published materials illustrated by Thoreau MacDonald in its Canadian Illustrated Books collection.

*Description control:*

Description and finding aid prepared by Gary Fitzgibbon, 2013. — Description based on *Rules for Archival Description* (Ottawa: Bureau of Canadian Archivists, 2008), with vocabulary authority from the Art & Architecture Thesaurus of the Getty Institute (Los Angeles, Calif.).

**Provenance access points:**

MacDonald, Thoreau, 1901–1989

**SERIES 1: SOME DESIGNS FOR H.D. THOREAU'S WALDEN**

**Date of creation:**

1933

**Extent:**

1 portfolio ; 41 x 28 x 5 cm

**Scope and content:**

Series comprises a portfolio of ink drawings made in Toronto in 1933 for Thoreau MacDonald's planned illustrated edition of Henry David Thoreau's *Walden* (originally published: Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1854), and a volume (booklet) of pencil sketches of the layouts of the book. A note pasted inside the front cover of the portfolio, written by MacDonald, indicates the scope of the project, which was to have included some 60 designs for the book.

**Notes:**

Credit line: Art Gallery of Ontario | Gift of E.R. Hunter, 2007

Also known as the Walden Portfolio. — Title of the series is based on the cover title of the portfolio: "Some designs for H.D. Thoreau's *Walden* made by Thoreau MacDonald, 25 Severn St., Toronto."

**Location: box 1**

FILE OR ITEM TITLE	DATE(S)	DESCRIPTION	BOX-FOLDER
Some designs for H.D. Thoreau's <i>Walden</i>	1933	1 portfolio (30 drawings : pen and black ink ; 16 x 13 cm or smaller)  Item is a portfolio enclosing drawings (matted) for illustrations in MacDonald's projected edition of <i>Walden</i> , including 20 drawings of historiated or inhabited initials containing birds, fish and plants of the area around Concord, Mass., and 10 scenes designated for particular chapters of the book such as Sounds, Visitors, Brute	box 1

FILE OR ITEM TITLE	DATE(S)	DESCRIPTION	BOX-FOLDER
		neighbours and House warming.	
<i>Walden, or, Life in the woods</i>	1933	1 v. of drawings : pencil  Item is a booklet (3 sheets of paper folded in quarto and bound in a wrapper with string) of layouts for the illustrated edition of <i>Walden</i> , comprising pencil sketches (5) for the frontispiece, title page, chapter openings and page openings. The title page of the booklet of layouts reads "Walden, or, Life in the woods by Henry D. Thoreau, with drawings by Thoreau MacDonald, Limited Editions Club, New York, MCMXXXIII".	box 1

## SERIES 2: PAGE LAYOUTS FOR *MARIA CHAPDELAINE*

### Dates of creation:

1937–1973

### Extent:

1 v. of drawings  
9 p. of textual records

### Scope and content:

Series comprises a volume (booklet) of page layouts made in Toronto in 1937 by Thoreau MacDonald for his illustrated edition of an English translation of Louis Hémon's *Maria Chapdelaine: récit du Canada français* (Paris : Bernard Grasset, 1921). On p. [2] of the booklet is a note written by MacDonald describing his concept for the illustrations and the planned number of drawings.

### Notes:

Title based on the contents of the series. Title page of the layouts: "Maria Chapdelaine by Louis Hémon, a story of French Canada, translated by W.H. Blake, Toronto, The MacMillan Company, 1937."

### Location: box 2

FILE OR ITEM TITLE	DATE(S)	DESCRIPTION	BOX-FOLDER
Page layouts for "Maria Chapdelaine"	1937	1 v. of drawings : pencil  Item is a booklet (8 sheets of graph paper folded in folio and bound with string) of layouts for the 1937 edition of <i>Maria Chapdelaine</i> , comprising pencil sketches (4) for the title page vignette, chapter endings and page openings.	2–1
Thoreau MacDonald note on Maria	[1937?] 1973	9 p. of textual records  File contains a short note handwritten by Thoreau MacDonald describing the origin of his illustrated edition of	2–2

FILE OR ITEM TITLE	DATE(S)	DESCRIPTION	BOX-FOLDER
Chapdelaine		<i>Maria Chapdelaine</i> , with a transcription (1973) of the note and photocopies of illustrated pages from the 1938 edition and the 1965 edition.	

### SERIES 3: CORRESPONDENCE

**Dates of creation:**

1968–1979

**Extent:**

12 p. of textual records  
4 prints

**Scope and content:**

Series comprises correspondence from Thoreau MacDonald to curator Nancy Robertson Dillow, to other staff at the Art Gallery of Ontario and to collector Thomas Roche Lee; with designs from Christmas cards.

**Note:**

The files in this series were transferred from the General Archives in September, 2013.

**Location: box 2**

FILE OR ITEM TITLE	DATE(S)	DESCRIPTION	BOX-FOLDER
N.R. Dillow correspondence	1968 1979	6 p. of textual records  File contains personal letters from Thoreau MacDonald in Thornhill, Ont. to Nancy Robertson Dillow.	2–4
Miscellaneous correspondence	1970 1974	6 p. of textual records 4 prints  File contains letters from Thoreau MacDonald in Thornhill, Ont. to Joan Murray (1970) and Sybille. Pantazzi (1974) of the Art Gallery of Ontario and to Thomas Roche Lee; Christmas cards designed by MacDonald and a card to T.R. Lee illustrated by MacDonald; with an undated invitation to an exhibition of works by Thoreau MacDonald at the Old Post Office, Grafton, Ont., illustrated with a numbered woodcut engraving.	2–5