

## HENRY G. PEABODY AND THE DETROIT PUBLISHING COMPANY IN BRITISH COLUMBIA

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On at least six occasions between 1887 and 1930 Henry Greenwood Peabody made photographic expeditions to the mountains and valleys of British Columbia. Among the several hundred photographs that resulted from his Canadian travels are the Detroit Publishing Company postcards seen here.

Peabody had graduated from Dartmouth College in 1876 and worked for a time as an engineer in New England. As a student he had discovered photography and earned something of a reputation locally as a talented amateur while utilizing the facilities at the Dartmouth College observatory. By 1879 Peabody had decided to make his hobby his profession and, until hired by the Detroit Publishing Company in 1900, worked as an independent – first for a year with Alexander Hesler in Chicago, where he married Dora Phelps, and then on his own in Boston until Dora's premature death there in 1898. In New England Peabody soon gained recognition for his marine and landscape photography and, in fact, regularly photographed the Americas Cup races held in the Northeast. Peabody sold much of his work through the Soule Photograph Company of Boston, which acted as his marketing agent. It was also for Soule that Peabody made his first trip to British Columbia in 1887 and then again in 1895 along the route of the Canadian Pacific Railway. With Dora's death, however, Henry sought security for his young daughter Mildred and accepted a position with the Detroit Publishing Company, then newly established by William A. Livingstone, Jr., Edwin H. Husher, and William Henry Jackson. Peabody worked with Jackson for nearly two decades, beginning in 1902 as the Company's "outdoor man" based in Pasadena, California. That year and again in 1903 Peabody spent most of the summer and early fall in British Columbia and Alberta making a

series of nearly 300 8 x 10 inch and 18 x 22 inch glass negatives of the Selkirks, Yoho, Lake Louise, and Banff for Company technicians back in Detroit. After leaving the company Peabody continued to travel throughout the Canadian Rockies by train (and after 1920 by automobile), often with daughter Mildred. The duo made their last known trip to British Columbia in 1925.

At the peak of its operations in 1903 the Detroit Publishing Company had created nearly seven million prints from the thousands of photographic negatives in its vaults. More than three quarters of its annual output consisted of color prints and postcards. The Company had earlier purchased the rights to the Photochrom process of color lithography from its originator, the Art Institute Orell Fussli of Zurich, Switzerland. The process enabled the Company to mass produce high quality but inexpensive "Phostint" postcards for both a North American and world market. At present nearly one hundred of Peabody's Canadian negatives are known to have been printed as "Phostint" cards. As this selection from his work demonstrates, Peabody, like dozens of his professional and amateur colleagues who traveled British Columbia with their cameras, was especially captivated by the glaciers, peaks, and valleys of the Selkirks. Throughout his three-quarters-of-a-century-long career Peabody consistently described his goal as convincing North Americans that their continent "contains scenery far more wonderful and far more beautiful than any they can find abroad," meaning in Europe or even Asia. His regular photographing expeditions to the Canadian "Alps," especially the Selkirks, were an integral part of that strategy.

When he left the Detroit Publishing Company to work once again on his own, Peabody transformed his Canadian negatives into a series of lantern slide and film-strip presentations titled "Through the Canadian Alps," which he scripted and narrated for audiences across North America. These presentations also were marketed through the Society for Visual Education in Chicago. Peabody continued to work actively as a photographer until shortly before his death in 1951.

Peabody's response to the Canadian landscape he visited so often and photographed so skillfully for nearly a half century is best summarized by two sentences he wrote in 1897, after his first Canadian photographing expedition:

The section of North America between the Rocky Mountains and the Pacific Coast, including the...Selkirk Glaciers, may well be called the Wonderland of the World. Stupendous crags, whose

cloud-piercing aiguilles are crowned with perpetual snow; magnificent fields of moving ice, beside which the glaciers of Switzerland sink into insignificance; ... all combine to produce a Wonderland unequaled in the world.

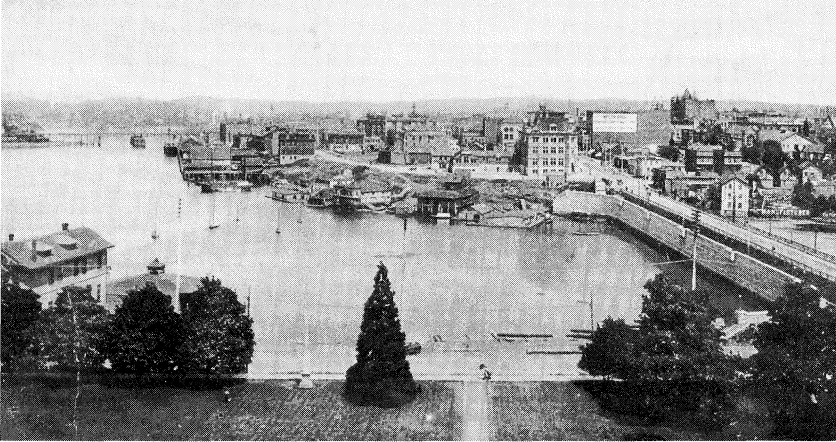


Figure 1: Henry G. Peabody, "Victoria, B.C., From Parliament Buildings," Detroit Publishing Company, 1903, No. 7203. Color Photochrom, 5 1/2 x 3 1/4 inches.

With only one exception, and that in 1895, Henry Peabody began his British Columbia photographing expeditions in Victoria and then proceeded from west to east "through the Canadian Alps." Figures 1 and 2 are companion views "from" and "to" the Parliament Buildings in 1903. The mountain backdrop in Figure 2 provides only a suggestion of the "stupendous crags" and "cloud-piercing aiguilles" that were to come.

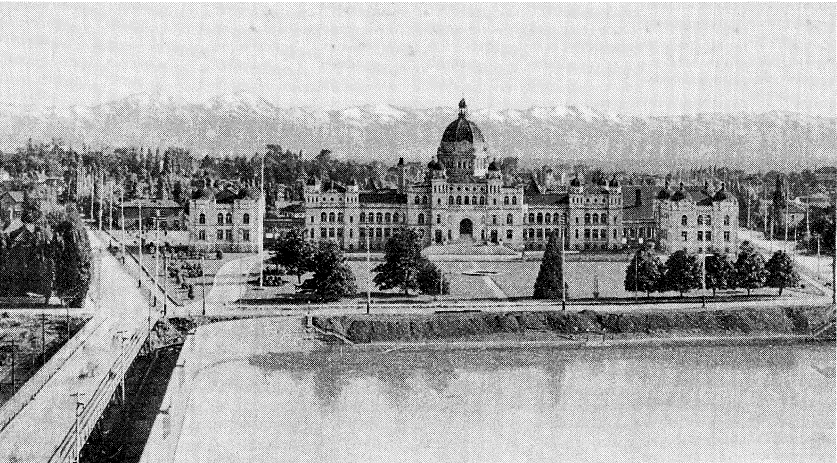


Figure 2: Henry G. Peabody, "Parliament Buildings, Victoria, B.C.," Detroit Publishing Company, 1903, No. 7204. Color Photochrom, 5 1/2 x 3 1/4 inches.

Peabody traveled by track, trail, and road and typically spent three to four weeks in the field on each of his “expeditions.”

The resulting negatives were then delivered to Detroit Publishing Company technicians who transformed them into the variety of print and postcard images that the Company marketed worldwide. In addition, Peabody retained the rights to his negatives, and when the Company subsequently was bankrupted he processed them into his own lantern-slide and film-strip versions of “Through the Canadian Alps.” The “Alps” presentations typically contained from 53 to 75 images and were accompanied by a narrative “text” that Peabody had written and printed on his own press to accompany the slide programs that he delivered personally to audiences or the film strips that were sold to educational institutions or private individuals. The images reproduced here are a small sample of those presentations. The narrative is drawn from Peabody’s own text.

From Victoria Peabody, and sometimes daughter Mildred, traveled by train to the Selkirks where, Figure 3, he noted that “a short stage ride brings us up to the site of the former railway station at Glacier House,...[where] within a comparatively small area, is condensed the finest scenery of the Selkirk Mountains and [where] there are several excellent trails over which interesting walks and climbs may be enjoyed.” On more than one climb Peabody was able to view and photograph, Figure 4, “the monolith of Sir Donald” and to “look directly down upon the huge expanse of the Illecillewaet ice-fall.” The slope of the glacier was “so steep, and is apparently uneven, that the huge ice mass becomes cracked in its descent and is upheaved in a confusing mass of towers, seracs and multitudinous crevasses.” “Under the leadership of a Swiss guide” he explored Illecillewaet’s “icy mountains” and “crystal canyons,” where “great caution and constant use of both rope and ice axe is required.” During the 1895 visit Peabody photographed, Figure 5, “the figure of the guide, standing on one of the seracs near the center of



Figure 3: Henry G. Peabody, “Hermit Range, Selkirk Mountains, B.C.,” Detroit Publishing Company, 1902, No. 6432. Color Photochrom, 5 1/2 x 3 1/2 inches.



Figure 4: Henry G. Peabody, "Sir Donald and Illecillewaet Glacier. Selkirk Mountains, B.C.," Detroit Publishing Company, 1902, No. 6433. Color Photochrom, 5 1/2 x 3 1/2 inches.

the view, [which] serves as an excellent scale for the proper appreciation of the magnitude of these formations." Peabody was impressed not only by Illecillewaet's magnitude but also by the glacier's dynamics. In 1887 and then during each subsequent visit he recorded the glacier's apparent recession. In Figure 6, made in 1902, Peabody is amazed to report that only fifteen years before "the edge of



Figure 5: Henry G. Peabody, "Crevasse Formation in Illecillewaet Glacier, B.C.," Detroit Publishing Company, 1903, No. 7217. Color Photochrom, 5 1/2 x 3 1/2 inches.

the ice reached approximately to the line of bushes. During the intervening...years it had receded a distance of about 400 feet.”

Leaving Illecillewaet and the Selkirks behind, Peabody then headed up the western slope of the Rockies through Wapta Canyon, Figure 7, where just beyond the “saftey switch” on the Canadian Pacific line “rises the towering mass of Mount Stephen, a colossal pillar of the Rockies.” Before moving on to Yoho and Field “short detours bring us to the Natural Bridge,” Figure 8. Peabody described it as a “wall of rock extending across the lower end of Wapta Flats just above the point where the river begins its descent into the lower Wapta Canyon. A small and narrow cleft in this natural barrier affords an outlet for the river...[and]...through this contracted aperture pours the entire volume of the Wapta, a seething, boiling torrent which has its source at the very crest of the great Continental Divide.” Not too far beyond lies the Yoho Valley, which Peabody compared favorably with the Yosemite, both being “narrow valleys with precipitous walls, over which pour waterfalls which are the glory of both of these famous valleys.” There, however, the similarity ended. “On a warm August day”—the month of Peabody’s visit in 1902—“at the time of the year when Yosemite’s cataracts are merely scattered threads of silver, Takakkaw [Falls], Figure 9, is seen at its very best. Its volume, toward the end of a long sunny day, is increased enormously by the more rapid melting of the inexhaustible mass of ice [the Wapta Glacier] above.” But even more to Peabody’s liking was his ultimate destination in British Columbia, the Yoho Glacier, Figure 10, “the most beautiful of the many glaciers easily accessible to the transcontinental traveler.” At its base he found the Yoho River emerging “from a wonderfully beautiful ice cavern beneath a vertical wall of blue-green ice nearly 200 feet high....The outlines of this terminal ice-wall change very rapidly,” he cautioned, and it is extremely hazardous to venture near its base. Two huge cracks, or crevasses, which parallel its upper edge, indicate a

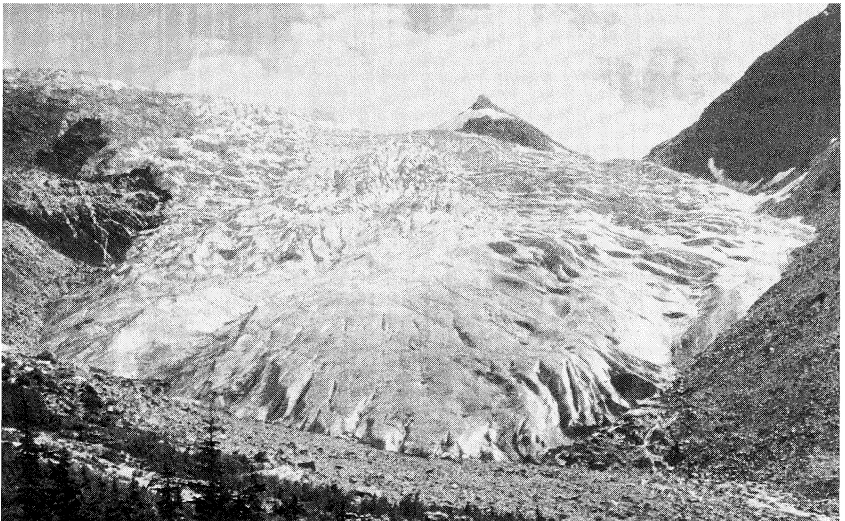


Figure 6: Henry G. Peabody, “Illecillewaet Glacier, Selkirk Mountains, B.C.,” Detroit Publishing Company, 1902, No. 6434. Color Photochrom, 5 1/2 x 3 1/2 inches.



Figure 7: Henry G. Peabody, "Safety Switch, Wapta Canyon, British Columbia," Detroit Publishing Company, 1902, No. 6429. Color Photochrom, 5 1/2 x 3 1/4 inches.

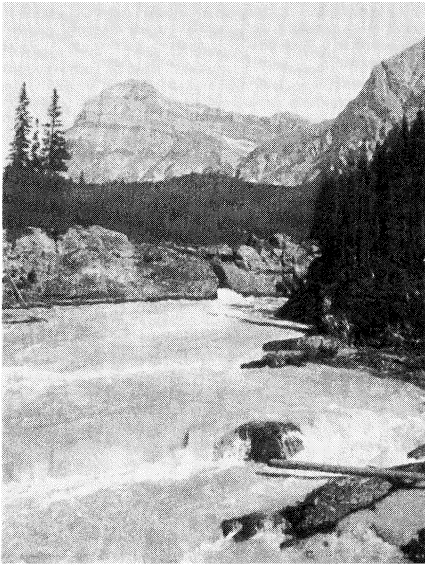


Figure 8: Henry G. Peabody, "Natural Bridge, Wapta River, British Columbia," Detroit Publishing Company, 1902, No. 6430. Color Photochrom, 3 1/4 x 5 1/2 inches.

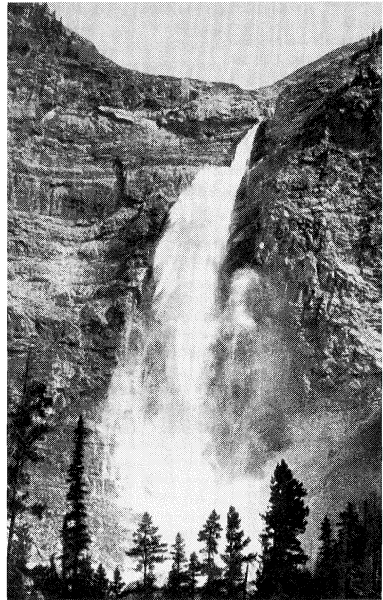


Figure 9: Henry G. Peabody, "Takkakow [sic] Falls, Yoho Valley, British Columbia," Detroit Publishing Company, 1902, No. 6428. Color Photochrom, 3 1/4 x 5 1/2 inches.



Figure 10: Henry G. Peabody, "Base of the Yoho Glacier, B.C.," Detroit Publishing Company, 1903, No. 7216. Color Photochrom, 5 1/2 x 3 1/2 inches.

not far distant moment when the entire face of the glacier will collapse and crash to the rocks beneath." Long before that day had come Peabody had left Yoho behind, passing through Field, Figure 11, under the "This is wonderful!" shadow of Mt. Steven on his way to Banff and the glories of Alberta just beyond.

At least twice again after his expeditions in 1887, 1902, 1903, and 1905 Henry G. Peabody retraced his steps through the "stupendous crags" and "cloud-piercing aiguilles" of British Columbia. The photographs he left invite us to do the same.

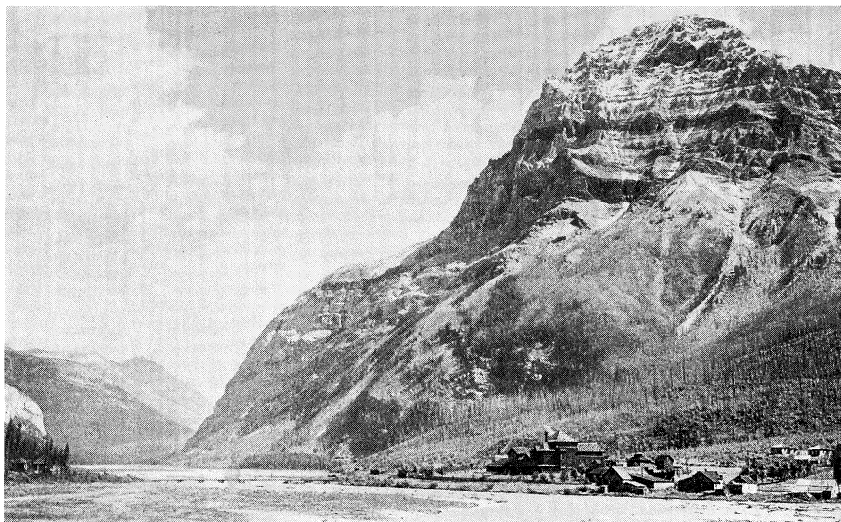


Figure 11: Henry G. Peabody, "Mt. Steven and Hotel, Field, B.C.," Detroit Publishing Company, 1902, No. 6426. Color Photochrom, 5 1/2 x 3 1/2 inches.