

John Kyle

1871 - March 29 1958

Associate, Royal College of Art, London England
Vancouver Studio Club

B.C. Society of Fine Arts (Founding Member)

Island Arts and Crafts Society (Founding Member, President)

British Columbia Artist (B.C.A., 1921)

John Kyle has been described as "an outstanding educationalist and one of the most influential men in the history of British Columbia Arts and Crafts". His services to the province were considered "a remarkable pioneering achievement". These were not idle words. The following biography highlights some of his accomplishments in education and in the arts, but is not intended to be comprehensive or complete - that task remains for another day. The information is presented in chronological order, as much as possible.

Kyle was born in 1871 in Hawick, Scotland, an old town built at the confluence of the Teviot and the Slitrig Rivers. His parents were established dealers in fine art, and Kyle noted in his memoirs, "Father had his shop full of the most interesting pictures, and one could see long lengths of golden mouldings leaning up against the wall, from which Father made picture frames".

He "studied art at his native place", according to a short biography published in Opportunities magazine in 1910, and distinguished himself at an early age. His teachers recognized his talent and skills, and Kyle later wrote that "I felt very grateful to my teachers, who recognized that I was good enough in drawing to enter the government exams. It was owing to this that I obtained the South Kensington Teacher's D Certificate that elementary school teachers were anxious to possess." He also won the Queen's Prize for drawing while at Hawick School.

Kyle graduated from Hawick School in 1885, and for the next eight years worked as a watch-maker and jeweler while taking art courses at night school. He applied for a national art scholarship without success, then took a position as Assistant Art Master at a school in Lancashire. His artistic ambitions were not to be thwarted, though, and in 1897 he won a three-year scholarship to the Royal College of Art in London, later noting that "those were the three most interesting years in my life". While there he "went through various courses with great credit", and was made an Associate of the College, with Honours, with the designation ARCA (Hon). In Canada, this can be confused for the identical ARCA, which represents an Associate of the Royal Canadian Academy of Art. In national competitions "open to the entire Kingdom", Kyle also won the Queen's Prize for Artistic Anatomy, and a Bronze Medal for achievement.

After leaving the College he "studied for a time in Bruges" and "completed his artistic training in France". He painted in Paris in 1899 before returning to England, where he took up a position as Second Master at Huddersfield Technical School in Yorkshire. Four years later Kyle accepted the position of Head Master in Alloa, Scotland, where he established an art school. This was the first, but not the last, time that Kyle would help found an art school. He apparently only taught in Alloa for seven months, though, before moving to Canada.

A letter of recommendation was written by his former employer at the Alloa Academy for Kyle.

When Kyle arrived in Vancouver in April 1905 to take up the position of Art Supervisor for City Schools in Vancouver he was thirty-four. The School Board's 4th Annual Report, for the year ending December 1906, noted his appointment:

"The Board has been fortunate in securing in Mr. Kyle, as Supervisor of Drawing, a man of excellent ability and tact, and we can confidently look forward to rapid improvement in this class of work."

The Report also included a brief report from Kyle, who stated that he had been on the job for 9 months and was looking forward to the work:

"My aim in the young classes is to train the sight and dexterity of the hand, by drawing mostly from real objects, to train and develop the innate desire for color, and foster a love for the beautiful."

In the Vancouver School Board's 7th Annual Report, for the year ending 1909, the Chairman of the School Board noted:

"By far the biggest milestone of the year, however, was the successful establishment of Night Classes. These have been an unqualified success. We only expected about 200 pupils, but we got over 600. I am glad to say that interest still keeps up, and additional classes are now being formed. This movement, if it gets proper encouragement, will have a far-reaching effect on Vancouver as an educational and industrial center. In this connection I should like to say that a great deal of the success of this movement is owing to the untiring energy of Mr. Kyle..."

In addition to his work for the School Board, between September 1907 and May 1908 Kyle wrote and illustrated six articles on leatherwork, repoussé, and stencilling, that were published in *Westward Ho!* magazine under the heading Home Arts & Crafts. A few months later in August 1908 he started a new series of articles, *Sketching From Nature*, by wryly commenting: "After dealing with so many crafts suitable for working at home during the long winter evenings, it has been suggested that I change my subject with the season and give some hints on sketching from Nature."

The articles on sketching were discussed in the B.C art history book *From Desolation to Splendour*, by Tippet & Cole: "In painting, Vancouver artist and teacher John Kyle prescribed that "the eyes should be half closed" in order to see tones, the relative depth of shades and the depth of colour masses. And he advised his students, "never sit in direct sunlight, unless under an umbrella"."

The articles were accompanied by illustrations by Kyle, where he showed how to build up a pencil sketch by layers, do a watercolour wash, or frame a scene with a piece of cardboard with a hole cut out of it. He also drew a number of pen and ink illustrations for poems and articles in *Westward Ho!* by other authors, as well as for the monthly jokes column *Helps to Smile*.



Kyle displayed his work in Vancouver at Studio Club exhibitions in 1906 and 1908. In 1908 Kyle was one of five people who got together in Vancouver to create a new arts society. They put out a public call for members and assistance, and on November 13, 1908 a general meeting was held. The B.C. Society of Fine Arts (BCSFA) was formed that night, with twenty members including Kyle, who was appointed Honourary Treasurer. The group held their first annual exhibition five months later April 20-23, 1909, with 179 original artworks by local artists on display, nine of them Kyle's. He continued to exhibit with the BCSFA, showing another twenty-five paintings between 1909 and 1915. His subject matter, from titles of paintings listed in exhibition catalogues, was a record of his travels abroad and of life on the West Coast.

In 1909 Kyle created the first B.C. night school classes in art. They were given in six Vancouver schools, but today only the original Seymour School building at 1130 Keefer Street remains as it was then. The biography in *Opportunities* magazine noted that "Mr. Kyle has taken an important part in the establishment of technical evening classes in Vancouver, among which those devoted specially to art work may be mentioned as doing great credit to the institution and management. It is not too much to say that in his art teaching in the public schools, he has done much for art in this Province." That same year Kyle "was instrumental in bringing W.P. Weston to the city as an instructor".

In 1910 Kyle traveled to Great Britain and back, and the Vancouver School Board's 8th Annual Report noted:

"Mr. Kyle, while in Great Britain, was authorized to purchase pictures for the schools, and selected for each school a picture of Queen Victoria, Edward VIII, George V and Queen Mary; also a large number of other pictures, which, when framed and placed in position, will do much to develop the taste of the pupils and beautify the halls and classrooms."

In 1910 Kyle was appointed Art Master at the Vancouver Normal School. In 1913 he was appointed Director of Technical Education for the Province of British Columbia. He moved to Victoria to take up the position, which he held until his retirement in 1938. The appointment was noted as far away as London, England in a February 1918 article in *The Studio* magazine that stated one of the active members of the BCSFA group was "John Kyle, a former South Kensington student, who is now employed by the B.C. Government as Director of Technical Training".

Kyle was one of the founders of the Island Arts and Crafts Society, and exhibited in a number of their shows in Victoria, including 1913, 1915, 1917, and 1921. He had three paintings in the BCSFA 1917 show in Vancouver, another three in 1921, and was also in exhibitions in 1924, 1926, and 1927. His career as an artist tapered off, though, as his career in education (and his new family life) took over his time and efforts. W.P. Weston and Charles H. Scott both commented that Kyle's time was so fully occupied with his duties

that he had little time for painting.

In 1917 the Department of Education, in conjunction with the Department of Mines, created Coal Mining Correspondence courses, partly in response to Kyle's concerns after visiting coal miners at Nanaimo. In 1919 Kyle assisted UBC in giving World War I veterans instruction in agriculture, mining, mechanics, steam engineering, and machining.

David Blair was the author of "Blair's Canadian Drawing Series", art instruction workbooks for schools, first published in 1909. They were "authorised by the Council of Public Instruction, British Columbia". In his introduction to the third edition of March 1918 Blair noted that "My thanks are due to Mr. J. Kyle, A.R.C.A., for several important suggestions in connection with the work."

In 1919 Kyle organized the distribution of notes and textbooks to 86 children living in isolated parts of the province. This was the first time elementary correspondence courses were offered by the Education Department in BC. Thirteen of the children were living in lighthouses, and Kyle noted in the 48th Annual Report of the Public Schools that "this unique educational step has been the means of bringing a note of pleasure and profit into their otherwise lonely lives." Ten years later there were over six hundred children taking the correspondence courses.

Kyle married Nellie Hadfield on August 10, 1920, in a "quiet ceremony" at Christ Church Cathedral in Vancouver. The groom was a 49 year old Presbyterian bachelor, the bride was a 27 year old Methodist spinster. Kyle was living in Victoria at the time, and Nellie, an English-born school teacher, moved from her home in Vancouver to join him.

In April of 1921, an article titled "Important Meeting of British Columbia Art League" in the Western Woman's Weekly noted that: "Helpful and effective plans for the coming year have been laid down as shown by the reports of various committees ... Mr. Kyle, Provincial Organiser of Technical Education, will be asked to give the benefit of his knowledge and experience to the League in the matter of starting classes in arts and crafts under the League's auspices."

Kyle lectured at a league-sponsored meeting at the Technical School auditorium in July 1921, where he talked for an hour about the life and art of William Morris, the famous craftsman designer of Victorian England.

In 1924 Kyle taught Applied Design at the Summer School for Teachers in Victoria. W.P. Weston was also teaching at the Summer School that year.

The B.C. Art League continued their fundraising and membership efforts for another couple of years, but finally approached the government for help when they realized that they weren't able to start and run an art school on their own, let alone an art gallery as well. A series of meetings were held in early 1925 between the BCAL and the Education Department, represented by John Kyle. He outlined the financial conditions that needed to be met in order to have his support for starting the school.

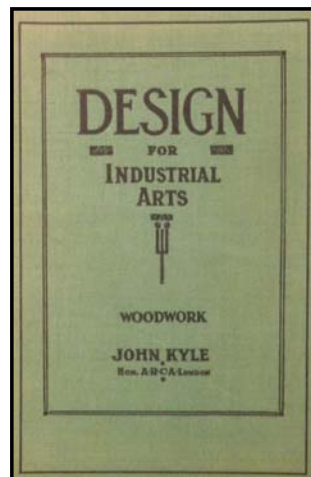
The conditions - mostly monetary, such as making the students pay \$50.00 per year tuition to help fund the school - were met, at least on paper. The way was clear for the school to open, and even a slight hitch in the provincial budget did not stop the Vancouver School of Decorative and Applied Arts (VSDAA) from taking its first students in the Fall of 1925 in facilities borrowed from the School Board. The school has been in continuous operation since then, although its name and location has changed a number of times, and it is now called Emily Carr Institute.

In his annual report for the 1929-1930 school year, Kyle wrote that "the School of Decorative and Applied Arts represents the refinement of technical education, in so much as mechanical skill alone is incomplete. Maximum success can only be gained by a combination of art and mechanical skill, and it is only by a realization of this situation that the greatest value can be added to the natural resources of the province". Charles H. Scott, Director of the VSDAA for many years, later wrote that "much praise was due Kyle not only for starting the night art classes in the city, but for taking "art education to every School Board throughout the province".

In June 1926 Kyle wrote a short article *On the Selection of a Career*, published in *School Days* magazine in Vancouver.

An article in Maclean's magazine, March 1927, stated that "under instructor Howard (John) Kyle, women potters in Victoria are decorating pottery with Indian motifs in response to an influx of tourists". Later that year that Kyle was appointed Director of the Teachers Provincial Summer School in Victoria, a post he held until 1936. This was the last year that Kyle was a member of the BCSFA. He could only do so many things at once, and the activities of the BCSFA were mostly in Vancouver while his were mostly in Victoria.

Kyle is credited with giving Emily Carr the first public exhibition of her unique West Coast paintings, while he was Director of the Summer School in Victoria: "It was fortunate for the arts that anything new and vigorous could count on Mr. Kyle's support, unpopular though it might be at the time. He ranks among the very first in the west to have grasped the importance of Emily Carr's gifts, being in fact the first to sponsor an exhibition of her work. As Director of Summer School, he staged a large display of her paintings for the benefit of teachers from all parts of the province."



In 1931 Kyle wrote and illustrated three books for teaching woodwork, lettering, and metalwork, titled "Design for Industrial Art", published in Toronto by Thomas Nelson & Sons. In the General Preface to the volume on lettering, Kyle wrote: "In the light of present-day educational philosophy the subject of industrial arts has assumed a broader aspect than ever before. Creative thought and motor activities have been brought into close relationship; aesthetic and constructive problems are correlated with each other and the educational worth of industrial arts has been increased, enriched and dignified."

He also gave practical advice: "Excellent pens for script writing and poster work are made by William Mitchell, Birmingham, England. The prices will be found to be more suitable for school boys and girls; Script pens, five cents each or fifty cents per dozen; Poster pens, sixty cents per dozen. A good pen for large work is called the 'Witch' - price ten cents."

In 1935 Arthur Lismer, one of the members of the Group of Seven, was traveling through Western Canada on a lecture tour with more than one purpose, and he noted in a confidential report to the National Gallery his comments about meeting Kyle in Victoria:

"In Victoria I had some association with Mr. John Kyle, who is Superintendent of technical training for British Columbia, and was in charge of the summer courses where I lectured. He has ideas and is anxious to repeat the Art Gallery of Vancouver idea in children classes. I believe I excited his curiosity and he made the suggestion that such classes might be started at the Victoria high school on Saturdays and by associating with the museum give a new impetus to the encouragement of public interest. He is of the opinion that the Museum lectures were very good but not suitable to the Victoria public in their present form.

There are signs that some development in the home crafts and the bettering of conditions of the large rural population in the Fraser Valley may be started before long. They are interested in what Quebec is doing for their rural populations with schemes for local encouragement of home crafts. John Kyle is a Scotsman and an artist and is a very excellent man."

In 1936 Kyle visited Vancouver, attending a Theatre Party and Buffet Supper put on for the 1935 Graduating Class of the Vancouver School of Decorative and Applied Arts by the art school's Graduates Association.

Kyle retired in 1938, having held the position of Organizer - Technical Education for a quarter of a century. During that time the number of students registered in the B.C. school system had quadrupled to one hundred thousand. The responsibilities of his position had also expanded significantly. When he took up the position in 1914, Kyle was responsible for organizing Elementary and High School Correspondence, Home Economics, and Elementary Agricultural Education (abolished in 1928).

In 1937, just prior to his retirement, the B.C. Department of Education organization chart showed that he was responsible for organizing Extension & Adult Education, Elementary Correspondence, High School Correspondence, Home Economics, Physical Education, Community Self-Help Groups, School & Community Drama, and Dominion-Provincial Youth Training Programs. All of this was now accomplished with the help of a great many people, where he had once been a pioneer, and Kyle was always generous in his thanks to those working for him and appreciative of the support he received.

Kyle's paintings continued to be exhibited sporadically over the years following the 1927 BCSFA exhibition. He was in the Island Arts and Crafts exhibition of 1940-41. He had two paintings accepted to the 1949 First Jury Show of The Arts Centre of Greater Victoria: "H.M.C.S. Beacon Hill" and "Summer in Saanich". Entries had been requested from Vancouver Island artists only. The next year Mrs. Jonathan Rogers loaned one of his watercolours from her collection to the 40th Annual BCSFA exhibition in 1950 at the Vancouver Art Gallery).

He had a solo exhibition in 1957 at the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, a retrospective titled "Oils & Watercolours by John Kyle". There were thirteen oil paintings and seven watercolours in the show. The exhibition catalogue included a three page biography of Kyle and his achievements, with information supplied not only by Kyle, but also by the Deputy Minister of Education Dr. Harold Campbell and Miss Ethel Bruce, who provided "valuable assistance in unearthing many facts which Mr. Kyle was too modest to bring to our attention".

The exhibition catalogue noted, for example, that:

"As one of the originators of the Island Arts and Crafts Society of Victoria he helped to organize a number of its special loan exhibitions, notably that in the Crystal Garden during the last war. With his backing and guidance the Society also developed a wide range of art classes. Through his regular visits to school boards in various parts of the province Mr. Kyle persistently fostered the arts, often resorting to

ingenious devices to make their furtherance acceptable to board members who found it hard to believe in their desirability. He also did much to encourage the growth of music wherever he found no one else doing it. Mr. Kyle is now enjoying a thoroughly earned retirement in this city. Yet though advanced in years he still remains active, preferring to continue his services by teaching two of those provincial correspondence courses in art which he initiated many years ago."

He was eighty-six years old and still teaching. Kyle died a year later on March 29, 1958 at age 87, in a Victoria hospital. He was survived by his wife Nellie, two daughters, a son, a sister in Scotland, and three grandchildren. In 1960, two years after his death, three of his oil paintings were displayed in the Historical Section of the BCSFA's 50th Annual Exhibition, also at the VAG, on loan from his son Jack. The B.C. Society of Fine Arts ceased to exist in 1967, having continued on just a bit longer than the man who had helped to create it fifty-eight years earlier, itself passing from the public's eye almost as quietly as John Kyle slipped away.

The artists file on John Kyle at the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria has an undated exhibition catalogue from the Maltwood Museum at the University of Victoria for another solo exhibition of Kyle's work, titled "John Kyle - Artist and Educator, 1871 - 1958".

Kyle did not just participate in groups and societies - he created them. He did not just draw and paint, he created draftsmen and artists, potters and metalworkers and the schools to train them in. He died March 29, 1958, in the year that British Columbia celebrated its 100th anniversary. John Kyle was an important part of the development of B.C.'s educational system for almost half of that hundred years, and his contributions should not be forgotten. The technical schools he created and the art school he supported continue to teach, grow, and prosper. The continuing and distance education programs he created and organized still carry on today, following the path leading directly from the first steps he took almost a century ago.

Exhibitions

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

DATE	EXHIBITION	LOCATION
1957	Oils and Watercolours by John Kyle	<u>Art Gallery of Greater Victoria</u>
1958	John Kyle - Artist and Educator	Maltwood Gallery, Victoria

GROUP EXHIBITIONS

DATE	EXHIBITION	ARTWORK
1909 April 20 - 28	<u>BCSFA First Annual Exhibition</u>	Portrait, <u>H.J. DeForest</u> , Esq. A Cornish Village At Caulfields Lieut. Bundy Canal Scene, Bruges A Scene in Bruges Street in Bruges In Chinatown (#116) In Chinatown (#123)

1909 June 19 - July 17	<u>Studio Club</u> <u>Exhibition of Pictures</u>	An Old Veteran Caulfields Landing Hugomont Farm, Waterloo Canal Scene, Belgium Gathering Firewood
1909 November	<u>BCSFA</u> <u>Second Exhibition</u>	Early Dawn Deadman's Island Buccaneer Bay Secret Cove The Big Tree A Portrait Sketch
1910 May	<u>BCSFA</u> <u>Third Exhibition</u>	Quai du Rosaire Bruges Chateau Comtes Ghent Canal Scene Bruges
1912 Nov. 25 - 30	<u>BCSFA</u> <u>Annual Exhibition</u>	The Last Relic of the Beaver Chief's House, Alert Bay Chief's House, Alert Bay Chief's House, Alert Bay Indian Houses A Foggy Morning Main Street Sketch of Indian Mat Weaver Sketch of Indian Mat Weaver Sketch of Indian Mat Weaver Sketch of Indian Mat Weaver
1915 April	<u>BCSFA</u> <u>Works by Members</u>	A Misty Day in the Harbour, Victoria The "Casco" Totem Poles, Alert Bay "Flowery Teviot", Scotland Totem Poles, Alert Bay
1921 Sept. 19 - 24	<u>BCSFA</u> <u>13th Annual Exhibition</u>	Capilano Canyon The Arrival of the Boat, Bowen Island The Coast Range from Bowen Island
1950 April 25 - May 14	<u>BCSA</u> <u>40th Annual Exhibition</u>	Totem Poles, Alert Bay

References - MONOGRAPHS

Refer to BIBLIO.

References - GROUP EXHIBITIONS

100 YEARS OF B.C. ART (refer to VAG58)

References - GENERAL

VANCOUVER HIGH SCHOOL AND COLLEGE - Calendar Session 1906 - 1907

1906; 32 pages; published by Vancouver School Board; illustrated with photographs
Includes historical sketch, curriculum; list of previous year's students
Early reference to John Kyle, City Supervisor of Drawing

"HOME ARTS AND CRAFTS" by John Kyle

1907-1908, six articles published in *Westward Ho!* magazine

"SKETCHING FROM NATURE" by John Kyle

1908, articles published in *Westward Ho!* magazine

ISLAND ARTS AND CRAFTS SOCIETY - List of Exhibitors

FROM DESOLATION TO SPLENDOUR

Changing Perceptions of the British Columbia Landscape

1977, by Maria Tippet and Douglas Cole
Clarke Irwin & Co., ISBN 0-7720-1048-X
159 pages; illustrated; foreward by Jack Shadbolt
Excellent historical survey of Western art in B.C.

Editor's Note: there are a number of other references by Kyle that are not listed here, including his annual reports to the Department of Education.

Clippings

"Mr. Kyle, Provincial Organizer of Technical education, will be asked to give the benefit of his knowledge and experience, to the League in the matter of starting classes in arts and crafts under the League's auspices."

From "The B.C. Art League", by Mrs. Jack Hawkshaw
Western Woman's Weekly, April 23 1921

"The meeting in the Technical School Auditorium on Thursday evening last was enriched by a lecture from Mr. Kyle who, for an hour well spent, kept his hearers interested in the life and art of William Morris, Craftsman."

From "The B.C. Art League", by Mrs. Jack Hawkshaw
Western Woman's Weekly, July 23 1921

"...under instructor Howard (John) Kyle, women potters in Victoria are decorating pottery with Indian motifs in response to an influx of tourists."

Maclean's magazine, March 1927

