

In Facultate Artium.



*Ingenū magnæque spei adolescenti,*

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*Præmium hoc litterarium propter insignes progressus in*.....

*in classe*..... *datum est,*

*Examinatione habita in fine Sessionis,*

*Anno Domini MDCCCC.*

*Quod testor,*.....

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Brian Coleman

## McGill British Columbia, 1899-1915 \*

In the late years of Queen Victoria's reign, Vancouver was the epitome of colonial and naval traditions, the blending of enterprise and wilderness. Montreal, in contrast, was a representation of Victorian Gothic and commerce. One young British Columbian put it this way:

The Montreal of today — that iron-grey majestic old city of the 19th century — stands out in marked contrast to the Vancouver of today — the dashing and ambitious city of the twentieth century. In the one we see remembrance of a past fraught with all the events of changing regimes — we see not only the stability and security, but also some of the lethargy which centuries of gradual advance have produced. In the other we see men brimming over with enthusiasm, ready to trust to the future implicitly, and tied down by no musty traditions.<sup>1</sup>

An unexpected link between these two quite different cities was forged by the establishment of McGill University College at Vancouver.

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\**Editorial Note:* This topic has generated a great deal of interest among the scholars who have been involved with its pre-publication review. Both they and the author recognize that this paper merely provides an entrée into a fascinating and little-known aspect of the history of higher education in Canada; it is by no means definitive. A suggestion has been made that further research might be conducted in the Archives of U.B.C. as well as in the H. M. Tory Papers in the Public Archives of Canada, the Sir William Peterson Papers in the McGill University Archives, and the James Loudon Papers in the University of Toronto Archives.

## the debate over Victoria

In the late 19th century, British Columbia had no institution of higher learning but many British Columbians who valued education advocated the establishment of a Provincial university for the advantage of their youth and for the advancement of the Province. In 1872 John Jessop, Superintendent of Education for British Columbia, had written:

The fact... that British Columbia will soon require a Provincial University, capable of conferring degrees in arts, law and medicine, should not be lost sight of; and public lands in aid of such an institution should be granted at the outset of our career, as an integral portion of the Dominion of Canada.<sup>3</sup>

The discussion for and against such a proposal was lively in the public forums of succeeding decades. From the beginning, rivalry with the East and sectional interests in the Province were grist for the debate.

As things are now, a considerable sum of money is sent out of the province for the education of young British Columbians abroad. With a university established here this money would not only be retained, but scores of young men and women, from California and eastern Canada, attracted by the delights of the climate and the certainty of acquiring a sound education, would be sent to the Victoria university, the expenditure thus caused constituting a not inconsiderable addition to the trade of the town.<sup>3</sup>

In 1885, the Victoria Board of School Trustees passed a resolution favoring the establishment of a university and teachers' college<sup>4</sup> but the City Council decided against it in the following year.<sup>5</sup> However, proponents of Victoria as the site for a university continued to press their claims and victory appeared closer when Mayor Grant called a meeting to discuss the issue. A report of the meeting showed:

Moved by Dr. G. L. Milne, seconded by Joshua Davies, that it is desirable to establish a university in this city, to be called the University of British Columbia, for the object of general instruction and education in all the departments of science, literature, art, industrial pursuits and special instruction for the professions of agriculture, mechanical engineering, law, medicine and commerce.<sup>6</sup>

Then, in 1890, the Government of the Honorable John Robson passed a bill which incorporated the University of British Columbia, and newspapers of the day invited graduates of Canadian and British universities to become members of Convocation. When John Robson, as the first Chairman of Convocation, took his chair in the chamber of the Legislative Assembly he invited the Bishop of New Westmins-

ter to say the blessing, though he pointed out that the University would be run on "strictly sectional lines." \* But the University did not materialize. Nevertheless, the idea did not die nor did the original proposal for locating a college in Victoria. In December 1891, the City Council was asked to put up \$50,000 if wealthy citizens would match this sum. However, this proposal was rejected by the ratepayers by the narrow vote of 263 to 252.<sup>9</sup>

It now appeared to some that the idea of the university, as well as its location in Victoria, had been defeated and there were those who put the blame where they felt it best belonged! "It [U.B.C.] was knifed by the sectionalists of Vancouver Island in the Legislature, who will live to regret their action."<sup>10</sup> If the idea of a Provincial university was not forgotten by its earlier sponsors, the rejection by Victoria ratepayers at least appears to have made the advocates of university education more willing to accept a temporary compromise.

### **"a Canadian Oxford"**

The university question remained a lively concern for many and it only required time and the use of existing resources to make higher education a reality. Amendments in 1894 and 1896 to the *Public School Act of 1891* were the necessary first steps. These recognized that it was "in the interest of advanced education to enable the High Schools of the Province to become affiliated with one or other of the Canadian or foreign universities."

From the time of its founding in 1890, Vancouver High School had had a university preparatory program. As the decade went on, school trustees looked for extension of this academic work by an affiliation with a Canadian University. Thus, while A. H. B. Macgowan, Chairman of the Vancouver Board of School Trustees and Member of the Provincial Legislature was in Montreal, he entered into preliminary discussions with Sir William Dawson and Acting Principal Johnson of McGill University. Their conversations concerned the affiliation of Vancouver High School with the first and second year Arts program of McGill. McGill had, in fact, already granted affiliation to certain colleges in Quebec at Stanstead, Richmond and Quebec City. Affiliation meant that the colleges offered some undergraduate-level instruction that McGill counted towards a degree program.

Macgowan subsequently drafted a bill to secure necessary enabling legislation, but action was deferred until December 1897 when a formal application for affiliation was made. This was approved by

McGill and came into operation in September 1899. In the interval, statutes of McGill had to be altered to include permission for affiliations outside the Province of Quebec.<sup>11</sup> And so it came about, in the last academic year of the nineteenth century, that six students of Vancouver High School began their studies in first year Arts, McGill.

In 1902, McGill extended affiliations to allow for second year Arts.

Teaching was done by the staff on the High School, renamed Vancouver College. Subjects on the curriculum were English, History, Mathematics, Physics, Classics (Latin and Greek) and Modern Languages (French and German). Courses given duplicated those of McGill. Examination papers were set and marked by the McGill Examining Board and successful candidates were admitted *ad eundem statum* at McGill.<sup>12</sup>

The following year, Victoria High School (founded in 1874) also entered into affiliation with McGill and began first year Arts. Its first class of seven was held in the office of the Principal, E. B. Paul. In 1907, McGill extended second year Arts to Victoria College to make a class of two. Thus the groundwork was laid for the beginning of McGill University College of British Columbia.

Initiative to extend the fledgling university program was taken by Lemuel Robertson, a classics teacher at Vancouver College. He was appointed in 1904-1905 as a Classics Instructor at McGill by the Principal, Sir William Peterson. He interested Principal Peterson in the idea of McGill's extending the program of studies of Vancouver College and this led to the appointment of Dr. H. M. Tory, Professor of Mathematics at McGill, to implement the program.<sup>13</sup>

McGill, as Dr. Tory envisioned her role, was seen in British Columbia and elsewhere as the National Canadian University:

With the exception of McGill they [other Canadian universities] are all hampered by political or denominational control. McGill, however, free from all such limitations and dependent only upon disinterested benefactors, has flourished beyond all its rivals and has aimed at becoming the National Canadian University. While it is true that McGill has had in view mainly her own local advancement she has also, more or less consciously, acted in obedience to her national instinct . . . They [affiliated colleges] must become an integral part of the Corporation of McGill University, while the University as at present constituted becomes the head and centre of a group of colleges — a Canadian Oxford with its colleges decentralized. A University so organized will unify higher education wherever its colleges exist, and will inevitably react upon secondary and elementary education and so exert a powerful influence in the direction of a national system

of education. All Canada is McGill's sphere of activity, and the place where McGill can do most for education is the place for her colleges.<sup>14</sup>

Dr. Tory, with others, drafted legislation, *An Act to Incorporate the Royal Institution for the Advancement of Learning of British Columbia* (12 March 1906), to put higher education in British Columbia on a surer footing. Article 3 of the Act reads:

The Royal Institution may establish, at such place in British Columbia as the said McGill University may designate, a College for the higher education of men and women, under the name of the McGill University College of British Columbia.

The financing for the Royal Institution was to be shared at the beginning between McGill and public donations. Dr. Tory, writing to Sir William Peterson from Nelson, B.C., 15 May 1905, outlined McGill's contribution: "I think \$4,500 per year from us would start the thing going on a good basis. This, if possible, should be secured by a special endowment if we go forward and determine to hold the field permanently."<sup>15</sup> Later he added in his account of McGill in B.C.: "On Saturday, Sept. 17th, Sir William Macdonald promised \$5,000 per year for three years to give the plan a trial. This was deemed sufficient to warrant beginning the undertaking."<sup>16</sup> Then in 1906, he obtained a grant of \$50,000 from Andrew Carnegie towards the work of the College and public financial support was also manifest, according to a contemporary report:

Yesterday afternoon about \$3,400 was subscribed, to be donated in support of McGill University College of B.C., which is to be instituted in this province, as set forth in the legislation now before the House. The subscribers include many of the most prominent of the merchants, and now that the matter has been started, doubtless others who are willing will send in contributions. Such disinterested support is indicative of a general public spirit which bespeaks the success of McGill once it is established on the new basis proposed.<sup>17</sup>

## opposition

There were others, however, who, from the beginning of the idea of the Royal Institution, were opposed to McGill's further affiliation with education in British Columbia. There were five main sources of opposition:

1. Graduates of other universities, who felt that McGill was receiving an unfair advantage.

2. Columbian College in New Westminster, a Methodist College affiliated with Toronto, which aspired to share in a Provincial university and which received the support of some of the officials of the University of Toronto and of Toronto graduates in B.C.
3. Those who continued to favor Victoria as the site for a future Provincial university and suspected the intentions of McGill supporters in Vancouver.
4. Those who had a suspicion of Easterners in general.
5. Those who feared that McGill's strengthened role in the Province would weaken their hope for the early realization of a Provincial university.

One of the main reasons why the advocates of university education looked to McGill for affiliation rather than to another university was because McGill, as a private institution, could more freely enter into an arrangement with public schools outside Quebec than could publicly supported institutions such as the University of Toronto. Though this was the understanding from the first, when the 1906 Bill concerning the Royal Institution was before the House, James Loudon, President of the University of Toronto, took a different view. Loudon, who had a reputation for being irascible in his own university, was hardly less so in the present situation. When contention over McGill was at its height, and the issue for some time was front-page news, anti-McGill lobbyists quoted a telegram from President Loudon of 13 February 1906, which read: "Affiliation Vancouver schools never refused. Two years ago I recommended a general scheme of affiliation of schools to the West, and the Senate approved."<sup>18</sup> The Chancellor of Victoria College, Toronto, and Methodist officials were reported to have joined the lobby against McGill:

Chancellor Burwash is authority for the statement that a formal protest against the University Bill will be forwarded to the Lieutenant-Governor of British Columbia asking him to withhold his signature. The protest will be signed by Dr. Carman, general superintendent of the Methodist Church, Dr. Potts, secretary for education and Chancellor Burwash.<sup>19</sup>

Principal Peterson and Dr. Tory were both disconcerted by the conduct of the Methodist and Toronto officials. Dr. Tory explained that he was a Methodist himself (indeed, he was ordained in that Church), but he believed that to avoid the mistakes of other Canadian

denominational colleges was in the best interest of higher education in British Columbia.<sup>20</sup> Peterson, too, imputed the highest motives to McGill:

McGill's connection with British Columbia was established several years ago and has been attended with the greatest possible success. In seeking to develop that connection, McGill has not been actuated by any motive of rivalry with other universities. Its sole object has been to do what it can to promote the unification of higher education in Canada. It is important that growing communications in the West should be prevented from repeating the mistakes of the East, where there are so many small colleges, especially in the maritime provinces, out of all relations to each other and very often hampered by some denominational connection.<sup>21</sup>

Whatever McGill's intentions, British Columbia's suspicion of the East was a sentiment that ran throughout the debate. For example, a high school teacher from Victoria wrote about examination papers sent to McGill for marking:

I have never as yet been able to discover where there has been any practical benefit either to our High School or to be the cause of education generally, from the affiliation, neither have I been able to see where there has been any "benevolence" exercised on the part of McGill in entering into and carrying out this arrangement. . . . What then would I suggest? Why, that we should cut loose from all outside institutions, and, as it were, run our own show.<sup>22</sup>

Another opponent of affiliation complained that it would "take from our midst the students of British Columbia and send them to McGill to teach them the vices and prejudices of the effete East."<sup>23</sup>

Some British Columbians favored a Provincial university because "it would foster the spirit of independence and self-reliance in our own institution. It would give the children of poorer parents an opportunity to get a university education provided they had the ability and ambition to acquire it without the expense of travelling and living far away from home. . . ." <sup>24</sup> Understandably, others feared the control of local education by outsiders. Some reports spoke of the conspiracy of McGill, while the *Daily Colonist* reported that "Professor Tory, the Arch-conspirator, looked anxious and worried with evident surprise at the storm aroused by his apparently harmless and innocent Bill."<sup>25</sup> But the opposition to the creation of a Royal Institution in British Columbia never gained sufficient moment to affect the resolve of the Provincial legislators. The "harmless and innocent Bill" passed its third reading on 20 February 1906, received royal assent on 12 March and McGill University College of British Columbia formally came into existence.



## McGill University College of British Columbia

Despite the rivalries and the fears that Easterners would completely dominate the new institution, the first Board of Governors included only one outsider among its members, Principal Peterson of McGill.<sup>26</sup> And McGill University College got on with the job of providing higher education for young British Columbians. A contemporary account gives a realistic idea of the day-to-day operation of "McGill West":

Since taking over the old City Hospital by the University College of McGill the transformations which have been wrought in turning it into a modern educational institution have been very many. In the old surgical ward is a large classroom and the offices of the management of the college with the Principal's rooms. On the same floor is the chemical laboratory well stocked with the necessary apparatus for carrying on the work of physical research. In this department there are already seventeen students enrolled.

The upstairs of the building has also been remodelled and in the two classrooms accommodation is provided for fifty students in bright airy departments well suited to class work.

The library quarters contain the most interesting modern classics in English, French, German and Latin authors. The present library shelves are but a beginning and within a few months many more volumes will be added. . . . All the apparatus for exact instruction in these departments [mechanical and civil engineering] have been placed in the mechanical department of the new college which is in the east wing of the building.

Instruction in arts will be given as well as in the subjects of applied science and a creditable number of lady students is already enrolled. The present total enrollment is seventy-four and the staff, with Mr. [George] Robinson, principal of the High School, acting as principal of the College, includes Professors Dutcher, Davidson, Piper and Lemuel Robertson. . . . The present building has been made comfortable by the installation of modern heating and ventilation with the latest sanitary conveniences. The old hospital has also been made attractive by the laying on of a coat of paint which has completely changed its outside appearance.<sup>27</sup>

Successful though these endeavors may have been, it became more and more clear as the years went on that only a Provincial university could give full support to the development of higher education in British Columbia. McGill itself seems to have taken the position that it could help to pioneer and develop higher education in British Columbia, but that once this was accomplished, the establishing of an independent University of British Columbia was to be desired.

Dr. Henry Esson Young, Minister of Education from 1907 to 1916 and former student of Osler at McGill, was instrumental in realizing the efforts and dreams of many. He chose Frank Fairchild Wesbrook<sup>28</sup> to prepare wisely for the transition. On the first day of lectures, Thursday, 30 September 1915, McGill University College became the University of British Columbia with Wesbrook as its first President.

McGill graduates continued to contribute to the life of the Province and to its University. The *First Minute Book* of the Royal Institution, which also includes the early records of U.B.C., noted on 3 September 1915, that McGill graduates gave \$1,723.44 to the new University. The McGill Graduates' Scholarship and the Royal Institution Prizes for students at Victoria College as well, were a visible testimony to the continued presence of McGill B.C. and Dr. Tory, since 1908 President of the University of Alberta, was the first to address the Congregation or graduating class of the new University in 1916. Furthermore, when a bill was before the House to make Victoria College into a University of its own, the McGill Society of Victoria and Vancouver Island voted at its meeting of 22 January, 1963 to convey to the Government "its appreciation and congratulations."<sup>29</sup>

McGill's presence in British Columbia was a happy and beneficial relationship between Eastern and Western Canada, between an older and a younger generation of academics, between friends.

## references

(The correct name of *The Daily Colonist* before 1887 was the *Daily British Colonist and Victoria Chronicle*. To avoid confusion, I have used the same name for all references to this newspaper.)

1. W. E. G. Murray, "McGill and Canada," *The McGill Annual*, Vancouver, B.C., 1910, p. 61.
2. British Columbia Legislative Assembly, *Journals*, 17 December, 1872 to 21 February, 1873, p. 44.
3. *The Daily Colonist*, 15 October, 1885, p. 2.
4. *Ibid.*
5. *The Vancouver Daily Province*, 14 November, 1952, p. 4.
6. *The Daily Colonist*, 30 July, 1889, p. 1.
7. *Ibid.*, 6 July, 1890, p. 5.
8. *Ibid.*, 27 August, 1890, p. 2.
9. *The Vancouver Daily Province*, 14 November, 1952, p. 4.
10. *Daily World*, Vancouver, 9 April, 1892, p. 4.
11. Harry T. Logan, *Tuum Est: A History of the University of British Columbia*, Vancouver: U.B.C., 1958, p. 16.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 16.
13. E. A. Corbett, *Henry Marshall Tory, Beloved Canadian*, Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1954.
14. H. M. Tory, *McGill University in British Columbia* (A typescript in the Archives of U.B.C.), May 1906, pp. 4-5.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 17.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 19.
17. *The Daily Colonist*, 13 February, 1906, p. 5.
18. *The Vancouver Daily Province*, 14 February, 1906, p. 1.
19. *Ibid.*, 23 February, 1906, p. 1.
20. As Dr. Tory realized, British Columbia had had a tradition of non-denominational education: "They have here national schools, and are determined to maintain them. No clergyman of any denomination is allowed to teach in any school, to be a school inspector, to be a member of a School Board, or Supt. of Education. The Non-Anglican Clergy have consented to this, although they do not like it, in order to make Government supported church schools impossible. This was brought about in the early days when free schools were first established, because, when the Act was being prepared, influences were set in operation to secure the appointment of one of a group of Anglican Clergymen as Supt. of Education. Then the Methodists and Presbyterians took a hand with the above result." (Tory, p. 11). Though neither the Royal Institution nor U.B.C., when it came into its own, had a denominational slant, both were willing to provide places of theological study as part of the Royal Institution and of the University. *The First Minute Book* for the Royal Institution, which is in the U.B.C. Special Collections, puts it this way in a minute of August 1907, p. 96: "That it is the purpose of the R.I. [Royal Institution] to grant free use of site for a theological hall to any denomination wishing to affiliate its work with the work carried on under the R.I."
21. *The Vancouver Daily Province*, 10 February, 1906, p. 5.
22. *The Victoria Daily Times*, 1 April, 1907, p. 4.
23. *The Vancouver Daily Province*, 9 February, 1906, p. 13.
24. *Ibid.*, 8 February, 1906, p. 1.
25. *The Daily Colonist*, 11 February, 1906, p. 9.
26. See *Statutes of the Royal Institution of the Advancement of Learning of British Columbia*, p. 3.
27. *The Province*, 14 October, 1907, p. 2.
28. William C. Gibson, *Wesbrook and His University*, Vancouver: Library of the University of British Columbia, 1973.
29. *McGill Society Notes of Victoria and Vancouver Island*, 22 January, 1963. A copy of the *Notes* up to 1973 is on microfilm in the Archives of McGill.

Extract from

## The McGill Annual Report, 1915-16 \*

The foundation by the Provincial Government of the University of British Columbia has led to the discontinuance, as was foreseen and provided for at the time of its institution, of the McGill University College at Vancouver, B.C. A letter received by the Principal from the Hon. F. Carter-Cotton, Chancellor of the new University, with reference to the termination of the connection which existed in this form between the University and the Province of British Columbia, is of historical interest, . . . it was read at the meeting of Corporation on April 12th, 1916.

*. . . it would be most unfitting that the connection of McGill University with higher education in this Province, — a connection at once so honourable to her and so beneficial to us — should be allowed to terminate without some expression being given to our deep sense of indebtedness to you and to your University.*

*McGill University was quick to respond to the call of the friends of higher education in British Columbia for help and, in a spirit of true devotion to "the Advancement of learning" which justifies her charter name made it possible for work of university standard to be undertaken and carried on at a time when the Province itself was not in a position to do so, and for nine years now has been in a very true sense our Alma Mater.*

*The benefits our Province has derived from your University's connection with it, would be impossible to estimate. Many young people have received a university education for whom otherwise it would have remained an unaccomplished dream. An interest in higher education has been fostered not only in the young but in our people generally, and our sense of unity with the other parts of the Dominion and with the Empire as a whole, and of the possession of common ideals of citizenship and culture has been deepened. McGill University has left a lasting impression on our Province, and in closing I would express the hope that the connection may prove a guarantee of interest for the future on the part of your old and distinguished University in our newly established institution in the West. (pp. 19-20).*

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\*Brought to our attention by Mr. Andrew Allen, Director, Information Office, McGill University, and acknowledged with thanks.

M.G.