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## The Beginning of Teaching at McGill University

In 1821 McGill University came into being through the granting of a charter by King George the Fourth. Although the University "came into being" at this time, it might be fairly described as existing only on paper. There were no premises available for teaching, no students and no staff. Two years later a staff was appointed but the posts were purely nominal; there was still no teaching. Thus 1821, although accepted as the official founding date, did not see the birth of McGill University as an active educational institution. Indeed, teaching did not begin until 1829 and then only in medicine and as a direct result of the efforts of the medical officers of The Montreal General Hospital. In an article published in the Summer 1936 issue of *The McGill News*, Leonard Knott, well-known public relations counsel and writer, made the rather dramatic statement that McGill University was, in a sense, an offshoot of The Montreal General Hospital. This was perhaps an exaggeration but, like all exaggerations, it contained an element of truth.

Founded in 1821, The Montreal General Hospital was a teaching institution almost from the start. Clinical teaching was introduced within a few months after the admission of the first patients to the new hospital building on Dorchester Street East. However, the medical officers of the Hospital were not content to confine themselves to clinical teaching. They rented a house on St. James Street, near Place d'Armes, and provided it with chemical apparatus, anatomical and pathological specimens, and a library. There they founded a medical school, known as the Montreal Medical Institution. Opening its doors to students in the autumn of 1823, it was the first medical school to be established in Canada. Instruction was given in part at the house of the Institution on St. James Street and in part at The Montreal General Hospital.

Meanwhile the status of McGill University was becoming

more and more uncertain. James McGill had bequeathed valuable and extensive property and a substantial sum of money towards the erection of a university which would eventually bear his name, but prolonged litigation was delaying the implementation of his far-sighted plan.

Then, in 1829, the problem of creating a university with more than an existence on paper was neatly solved by “en-grafting” upon McGill University the flourishing Montreal Medical Institution, which, unlike the University, did have students, staff and premises for teaching. The Institution thus became the McGill Medical Faculty and, as a consequence, could call itself in literal truth the Founding Faculty. Teaching had now begun under the official auspices of McGill University. Four years later, on May 24, 1833, McGill University awarded its first degree — Doctor in Medicine and Surgery. The recipient, William Leslie Logie, became not only McGill’s first graduate but also the first person to earn a medical degree from a Canadian university.

This joining of forces by the Montreal Medical Institution and McGill University seems eminently reasonable in retrospect, but it involved much preliminary labour on the part of the medical staff of The Montreal General Hospital. The details of the litigation connected with James McGill’s bequest will not be set forth here. It is enough to state that there was grave danger that his bequest for the founding of a university might be declared null and void. By converting its medical school into the McGill Medical Faculty, The Montreal General Hospital made a notable contribution toward securing to the University its bequest from James McGill. Also, through this merger, Canada’s first medical school received the incalculable benefit of becoming a part of a university which would later achieve greatness under the leadership of Sir William Dawson.

Both The Montreal General Hospital and McGill University were founded in 1821. Both therefore observe their 150th anniversaries in 1971. In the light of this story of the beginning of teaching, the celebration of the two sesquicentennials in the same year is to be viewed as a most appropriate coincidence.