

**Mama Darragh**

## **McGill Alumnae**

Many times in history women have joined together for mutual support, to deepen their understanding of events, and to fight for needed social, political and educational change.

The first women graduates of McGill, all friends, founded the Alumnae Society in 1888 for these reasons. Of the eight original members, one became the first woman appointed to the McGill Faculty, one the principal of the High School for Girls and another the Warden of Royal Victoria College. Their concept of mutual improvement included women everywhere and, in Victorian times, the Alumnae became the nucleus of Montreal women petitioning for women's rights to higher education and decent working conditions. They started projects and embarked on others when the old needs disappeared; or, they persuaded other people to assume the responsibilities. The University Settlement grew out of an Alumnae soup kitchen and center for evening classes for women employed in factories. The Alumnae started the first hospital library for patients and, for twenty-five years, sponsored a public speaking contest for high school girls. Their activities have ranged from taking foster children and rolling bandages in time of war, to establishing a reading club and a training session on change, to presenting briefs on compulsory education and better salaries for elementary school teachers. Through continuing affiliation with the Montreal Council of Women, the Alumnae have remained involved in community action, locally and internationally.

Within the university, the Alumnae have raised money for scholarships and bursaries for women and increased the amount each year. They began career conferences, an off campus housing registry and receptions for new students. They have always maintained a close link with the Warden of Royal Victoria College where they held their meetings and they even petitioned the Board of Governors to enlarge this property. They raised money for a swimming pool and hall, as

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well as a Memorabilia Corridor and, in 1974, started a special loan fund which is administered by the Warden.

As well as providing services to students, the Alumnae Society is a liaison between the community and the university. The Alumnae have tried to make the university aware of the women's needs for a broadly based flexible university education backed up by professionally directed counselling services. They petitioned in 1936 to admit women into the Faculty of Architecture and in 1971 presented the first community brief to the Continuing Education Committee of Senate on part-time education. Women graduates are now represented on eight Senate committees and two selection committees, and their Alumnae committee represented Quebec at two seminars for the continuing education of women organized by the Canadian Association for Adult Education. As a founding and continuing member of the Canadian Federation of University Women, the Alumnae Society maintain links with university women in other Quebec universities and across Canada. Two results of Alumnae work are an evening part-time program in teacher education begun in 1966 and two night credit courses, "Introduction to Management for Women" and "Behavioral Dimensions of Women in Management," presented by the Faculty of Management in 1974-75.

The Alumnae have over 2000 members in the Montreal area and, now that McGill students have reactivated women's organizations, the Alumnae hope to find new ways of working together to meet the higher educational needs of women.



### *Homecoming*

Though none has ever bothered to molest  
The unmet lady getting off the train,  
She still has guilty dreams within her breast,  
For nutriment. But she is porcelain,  
For want of love. Now, on this harvest night,  
Her country birthplace lies in savage ease.  
On porches, in a wilderness of spite,  
Her cousins revel in their strategies.  
Their words incriminate the innocent —  
And so she is a spinster. Yet, in fall,  
She comes with no particular intent,  
To visit kin — a harmless ritual.  
And, palpable, she speaks. But kin are deaf  
To one who comes unbidden as a leaf.

*Deborah Eibel*