

## Notes and Comments

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1. When Leacock arrived in 1901, McGill College had a student population of close to 1,050; in 1936, when he left, it had grown to a little more than 3,000 full-time students.
2. Allan Anderson, *Remembering Leacock* (Ottawa: Deneau, 1983) provides interesting accounts and testimonials from students and colleagues documenting his teaching and various idiosyncracies.
3. Except Moritz and, to a lesser extent, Legate, his biographers have not consulted the administrative records produced by Leacock when communicating with the McGill administration.
4. According to R. Curry, Leacock saw his application rejected by Mavor in 1901. Ralph L. Curry, *Stephen Leacock. Humorist and Humanist* (New York: Doubleday, 1959), 69; Moritz (p. 93) and Legate (p. 37-38) also consider McGill as Leacock's second choice.
5. McGill University Archives, *Records of Principal Peterson*, File No. 9, (1892-1904), LA-LE. (RG 2, ...)

## McLennan Library: Twenty-Fifth Anniversary

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On Friday, June 6, 1969 at 3:00 p.m. following the Spring Convocation held earlier that day, there was a short ceremony when the Principal Dr. H. Rocke Robertson, the Chairman of the University Library Committee Dr. Stanley Frost, the Director of University Libraries Mr. Keith Crouch, and the Chancellor Mr. Howard I. Ross, after delivering brief speeches, officially opened the McLennan Library.<sup>1</sup>

This short and subdued ceremony, held in the Library's main hall, contrasts too vividly with the impressive and lengthy opening ceremonies held, seventy-six years earlier in 1893 for Redpath Library, to go unmentioned.<sup>2</sup> To begin with, only university officials participated. There was no participation by representatives of the deceased benefactor, Isabella Christine McLennan (1870-1960) after whom the library is named, or the alumni or the larger civic community beyond the University's gates. By contrast, in 1893 there had been speeches from the benefactor Peter Redpath, the Governor General, the Lieutenant Governor of Quebec, and other distinguished guests in addition to the Principal and a representative of the Chancellor. Another major difference from 1893, is that no commemorative book accompanied the opening of McLennan Library in which the speeches were recorded and intentions of the architect set forth. The tenor of the late 1960s, however, with its strong social opinions and student unrest militated against ceremony, celebration, and commemoration.

Yet McLennan Library, sitting as prominently as it does at the corner of Sherbrooke and McTavish streets, is probably the most visible building on the lower campus. In addition, it has proven to be a remarkably effective main library. Despite the enormous growth in collections, enrollment, and research activity at McGill during the last quarter century, the building has proven capable of handling them with great ease.

At some time, a full scale description of McLennan Library, its design and construction, will be needed along with a discussion of the people involved. The main elements of the story are as follows. In the late 1950s the crowded conditions in Redpath Library had made it obvious that a new library building would soon become necessary. Miss McLennan, who died in 1960 and whose family had long been benefactors of McGill, left the bulk

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McLennan Library Building, ca. 1970.  
(McGill University Archives)

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of her estate to the Library; this allowed a new building to be seriously considered. In 1962 planning of the new building commenced, strongly influenced by the recommendation of two American consultants, McCarthy and Logsden, that simply building a stack wing to the south of Redpath Library, as originally intended, would prove inadequate. Instead, they advised that a new main library building be constructed. This advice evolved into a decision to create a new main library complex: McLennan Library becoming a graduate research library with the Graduate School of Library Science having specially designed quarters on the street floor level, and Redpath Library becoming primarily an undergraduate library.

To oversee the new library's design, construction, and use a number of committees were established by the University and the Library. Their three main participants were Stanley Frost, Chair of the Library Committee, John Archer, Director of University Libraries from 1964 to 1967, and Alison Cole, Associate University Librarian. The building's architects were Dobush, Stewart, Bourke, with the major responsibility devolving upon David Bourke, a graduate of McGill's School of Architecture who has subsequently become the University's Secretary-General. He has vivid memories of being invited by Miss McLennan to the Linton Apartments for tea in 1954, when he won the McLennan Travelling scholarship.

Bourke, Cole, Archer, and Frost created a building that is notable both internally and externally. To begin with, the suggestion from some experts of having an underground building was rejected as such libraries can be claustrophobic and psychologically unhealthy. Since the building would be very large and would need to be strong enough to bear the weight of books, it was decided to construct it in reinforced concrete, with pre-cast concrete panels on the exterior, in the international modernist style. Three major design problems presented themselves: how to lessen the sheer impression of bulk such a large building must necessarily impart, how to ensure continued access to McTavish Street from the southern end of Redpath Terrace, and how to relate the new building to the asymmetrical 1893 and 1953 wings of Redpath Library directly to the north. A symmetrical building was the perceived solution with its four sides being almost exactly identical; although the building is rectangular, its north and south sides being somewhat longer than its east and west sides, it appears square. The only major asymmetry is on the north side: at the street level there is an entrance to the building and a staircase ascending to the terrace level where there is another entrance; there are also two enclosed bridges at the terrace level connecting McLennan with Redpath. No visual disruption is caused by the underground tunnel connecting the two buildings. The bridges, tunnel, and stairs between the Libraries permitted an open walkway linking the Terrace with McTavish Street. To reflect the old wings of Redpath Library, projecting towers were placed on all four sides of McLennan, making it a harbinger of postmodernism. The sense of McLennan's bulk is reduced by its four corners being notched and by its three horizontal planes: the vertical windows of the street level, the large picture windows of the main level, and the horizontal ribbon windows of the five stack levels.

The interior is characterized by its very large modules created by widely spaced groupings of columns which mean that the floors can be adapted for virtually any use. Another characteristic is the placement of the stack seating areas along the periphery beside the horizontal windows which permit maximum natural light for reading with minimum distraction from outside views. The books are protected from the sun's damaging rays by being placed in the centre.

The new building transformed the McGill library scene. Whereas Redpath Library had seating for only 500, McLennan sat 1,500 readers. When the renovation of Redpath was completed one year later an extra 1,500 seats became available in the main library complex for a total of 3,000. The approximately 700,000 volumes from the old library were moved into a building with double that capacity. Staff space which had been extremely cramped and inefficient was suddenly very spacious and efficient. The air conditioning system made summer work - for staff and users - significantly more comfortable. Finally, it must be remembered that the new building was designed to accept two additional stories should the need arise.

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Construction began in the late summer of 1967 for a building whose initial contracts called for expenditures of \$5,900,000.<sup>3</sup> Although an October 1968 opening was hoped for, the actual date was January 21, 1969. Eleven days earlier on January 10, Redpath Library was closed and a crew of 190 people worked on twenty-four hour a day shifts moving out all the books and furniture and leaving an empty shell. Its interior was subsequently gutted and rebuilt during 1969-1970 to accommodate the Undergraduate Library in the three lower stories and the Blacker-Wood and Blackader-Lauterman Libraries in the upper stories. Although the Undergraduate Library was disbanded in the late 1980s, the spatial configuration of Redpath remains much the same.

The total cost of building McLennan Library was eventually \$7,430,000: \$3,050,000 from the estate of Isabella McLennan and other bequests, \$2,880,000 from the government of Quebec and \$1,600,000 from the Canada Council.<sup>4</sup> Although this was a great deal of money at the time, by 1994 standards it seems relatively modest. McGill continues to enjoy a main library whose total stack and user capacity has yet to be exhausted. It also enjoys an outstanding building whose internal convenience and external prominence continue to attract attention and comment.

One question still remains. When will a plaque be unveiled commemorating Isabella McLennan, the McLennan Family, and the Library's formal opening on June 6, 1969?

### **Notes**

1. The author acknowledges with gratitude the assistance of Mr. David Bourke in writing this article. Also of assistance were the following records: McGill University Archives. RG40 Library. Files 621-623 container 0174, and file 647 container 0175; McLennan Library, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections. Alphabetical files, McLennan Library.
2. Peter F. McNally, "Dignified and picturesque: Redpath Library in 1893," *Fontanus*, v. VI (1993), 69-84.
3. "New McGill library designed to break 'bottle-neck' in learning process," *Montreal Star*, (August 12, 1967), 23.
4. "The McLennan Library," *McGill Alma Mater Fund Newsletter*, v. 1, no. 2 (February 1969), 3.

## **Macdonald Physics Building: 1893-1993**

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This year is the centenary of the opening of three important buildings on the downtown campus: the Macdonald Physics Building, the Macdonald Engineering Building and Redpath Hall. Only the first of these (Figure 1) will be discussed in this article.

The teaching of physics at McGill began in 1854, when the Department of Mathematics and Natural Philosophy was set up. However, little progress was made in teaching 'practical science' before 1878, when the Faculty of Applied Science was inaugurated, with Henry T. Bovey, Professor of Civil Engineering, as Dean. The next step was taken in 1891, when Sir William Macdonald endowed a chair of physics and John Cox, a Fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge, was appointed as the first incumbent. Macdonald also provided generous funds for erecting and equipping a physics building and Cox was asked to visit laboratories in Europe and America to garner ideas as to the design and furnishing of such a building. The architect chosen was Andrew T. Taylor.