

A TRIBUTE TO MARGERY WYNNE TRENHOLME, BA'35, BLS '46 LIBRARIAN AND BENEFACTRESS

**In honour of the donor who supported this issue of *Fontanus*
Margery W. Trenholme**

It is indeed both a pleasure and an honour to recognize the generosity of the late Margery W. Trenholme whose gift to the University is making possible the publication of this issue of *Fontanus*. Many readers of *Fontanus* may be interested to learn more about this exceptional person whose generous recognition of her alma mater has created the Margery Trenholme Chair in University Libraries, the first of its kind in Canada. Her bequest encouraged the Blachford family, in particular her nephews John and Norman, to provide additional support for this Chair. Principal Bernard Shapiro worked with anonymous donors to establish the full endowment necessary to support this unique Chair. These gifts and Principal Shapiro's leadership in the endeavour are providing one of the best funded chairs in McGill University and are helping McGill respond to the challenge of keeping pace with library resources development. The creation of the Trenholme Chair indicates the strong support that the McGill administration is providing to the Libraries in adapting to the information age. On a personal basis, I may, I hope, be permitted to add that it is a great honour and privilege to be the first recipient of the Trenholme Chair.

Margery Trenholme completed her B.A. at McGill on scholarships and took first class honours in classics. She later observed "My ambition was to be a lawyer but women were not admitted to the bar until 1941." Instead, following graduation, she took a year of teacher training, spent several years teaching in the Montreal elementary school system and then took her degree in Library Science. In 1946, she was appointed Librarian at the Law Library at Harvard, but soon returned to McGill to become Librarian at the Commerce Library, where she spent the next three years. "During that period, the nurses returning from the war were being trained as administrators for schools of nursing" she explained. "As the Librarian at the Commerce Library, I was able to organize and establish the library of the McGill School for Graduate Nurses and Physiotherapists under a special grant from the Kellogg Foundation."

The association of Margery's family with McGill extends over five generations. Both her parents were graduates, her father, Norman MacLaren Trenholme (B.A. 1895), was made Chairman of the Department of History at the University of Missouri in Columbia, and her mother, Ethel Ida Hurst graduated B.A. 1896. Following the death of her mother, Margery first came to Montreal in 1921, four years before the death of her father, and was brought up by her maternal aunt, Isabel Maude Hurst (B.A. 1899), a Montreal school teacher. She first attended Victoria Elementary School and then was a scholarship student at the High School for Girls, where her aunt taught for many years, prior to entering McGill. Her grandfather, the Hon. Justice Norman William Trenholme (B.A. 1863, B.C.L. '65, M.A. '67, D.C.L. '87) was Dean of Law at McGill from 1889 to 1897 and later became a judge of the Superior Court of Quebec. Margery Trenholme's aunt, Katherine Torrance Trenholme (B.A. 1910, Emeritus Member of the Graduates Society), was the formidable Circulation and Reference Librarian at the old Redpath Library of McGill for many years. A daughter, son and grandson of Grace Isabel Blachford née Trenholme (Dip. Ed. 1925), Margery's elder sister, continued the McGill tradition: Nancy Cynthia Clark née Blachford (B.A. 1956), John Blachford (B.Eng. 1959, Ph.D. 1963) and Ian Savage Blachford (B.A. 1993).



Margery Wynne Trenholme.

In 1950 Margery assumed the position of Chief Librarian at the Fraser Institute, Montreal's first free public library, an association which was to last 33 years. At that time the Institute was limited to providing reference library services, and her challenge was to re-establish a circulation department. This wish was fulfilled in 1959 when the newly named Fraser-Hickson Institute moved to new quarters at its present location in Notre-Dame-de-Grace. Margery instituted many innovations, incorporating a children's library, a music appreciation room and a rare book room. Her successful endeavours were recognized by the Board of Trustees in May 1959: "The Institute... gratefully acknowledges the energy, efficiency and leadership of Miss Margery Trenholme, its Chief Librarian, in organizing and directing so thoroughly and quickly the preparation of the new building and its contents for wider services to the public". For

Margery, this meant especially children and the elderly, and she impressed on her staff that its prime duty was to serve: "Libraries should be more people than books; never be too busy to do a kindness. I am glad our library provides large print books and has a shut-in service, that serves the old and the handicapped who so often are forgotten."

She was later to observe "I have found it possible to help in a small way, many older people, whether to find help in the home for them, nursing services or in other ways". Margery was elected a Life Governor of the Montreal General Hospital for her generosity and active association with the mission of this institution.

Margery was an active member of the Canadian Federation of University Women for many years and served as a member of the executive. She was a blue stocking, and her concern for women's rights no doubt dated from the time when she saw herself as a budding lawyer but became a librarian when this aspiration was frustrated by discrimination. She was always sensitive to existing inequalities in the law concerning women, and welcomed the establishment in Canada of a Human Rights Commission. Staunchly independent, she was also an inveterate traveler on behalf of her feminist interests and principles. "Since I first became interested in the CFUW, I have attended conferences from Halifax to Vancouver, usually on university campuses, and I have made many friends over the years. The larger organization, the International Organization of University Women, has enabled me to meet professional women from around the world."

She was also an active member of the University Woman's Club of Montreal (her aunt Isabel was a charter member of the organization) and Margery was twice elected president. She was also a member of the Montreal Special Libraries Association, the Quebec Library Association as well as the Canadian Library Association.

Frances Groen
Trenholme Director of Libraries

The text of part of this paper is based in part on an unpublished tribute to Margery Trenholme prepared by Nancy Cynthia Clarke, niece of Margery Trenholme.