

J.W. McConnell and the Chancellorship of McGill University, 1942–3

by William Fong

ABSTRACT

J.W. McConnell (1877–1963) was one of the most successful Canadian businessmen of his time, and possibly the richest man in Canada for much of his life. A promoter of stocks early in his career, he soon became a major industrialist and investor. He was president of St. Lawrence Sugar Refineries Limited for almost fifty years and publisher of the Montreal Daily Star and other newspapers for almost twenty-five. Among the companies of which he was a major shareholder were the International Nickel Company of Canada, Brazilian Traction, Montreal Tramways, Montreal Light, Heat and Power, Ogilvie Flour Mills, Canada Steamship Lines, and Borden. His reputation spread to Wall Street and the City of London, not only for his business acumen but also for his great generosity to medical and educational causes. He was one of the principal founders of the Montreal Neurological Institute. From 1909 to 1927, he was one of the most effective fundraisers in the country, for the YMCA, the war effort through Victory Loans, and the hospitals of Montreal. And for the remainder of his life he was the most generous contributor to good causes in Montreal if not in Canada as a whole.

With Lord Strathcona and Sir William Macdonald, he became one of the three greatest benefactors of McGill. After the death of Sir Edward Beatty, the Chancellor of the university, in 1943, McConnell was a natural candidate to succeed him. The board of governors, who were responsible for choosing a new Chancellor, were nearly all businessmen like him, and his assumption of the post would have been indeed in the tradition of James Ferrier, Strathcona, Macdonald and Beatty. But McConnell did not become Chancellor, and this is the story of why he did not. In abbreviated form, this was published in chapter 17 of the author's biography of McConnell in 2008. This article however presents considerably more detail.

RESUMÉ

J.W. McConnell (1877–1963) fut un des hommes d'affaires les plus prospères de son époque, et possiblement un des hommes les plus riches du Canada pour la plus grande partie de sa vie. Promoteur d'actions au début de sa carrière, il devint rapidement un industriel et un investisseur d'importance. Il fut président de la compagnie St. Lawrence Sugar Refineries Limited pendant presque cinquante ans, et éditeur du Montreal Daily Star et de divers autres journaux pendant presque vingt-cinq ans. Il fut un actionnaire important de plusieurs compagnies, notamment International Nickel Company of Canada, Brazilian Traction, Montreal Tramways, Montreal Light, Heat and Power, Ogilvie Flour Mills, Canada Steamship Lines, et Borden. Sa réputation se progagea jusqu'à Wall Street et Londres, non seulement pour sa perspicacité en affaires mais aussi pour sa grande générosité envers les bonnes causes dans les domaines de la médecine et de l'éducation. Il fut un des fondateurs principaux de l'Institut neurologique de Montréal. De 1909 à 1927, il fut un collecteur de fonds les plus efficaces au Canada, au profit de l'organisme YMCA, de l'effort de guerre par le biais du programme des Prêts de la victoire, et des hôpitaux montréalais. Il demeura pour le reste de sa vie un fort généreux contributeur aux bonnes causes à Montréal, sinon au Canada tout entier.

Avec Lord Strathcona et Sir William Macdonald, il devint une des trois plus grands bienfaiteurs de l'Université McGill. Après la mort de Sir Edward Beatty, le chancelier de l'Université, en 1942, McConnell fut un candidat tout désigné pour lui succéder. Les membres du Conseil des gouverneurs, qui avaient la responsabilité de choisir un nouveau chancelier, étaient presque tous des hommes d'affaire comme lui, et il aurait été dans la tradition de James Ferrier, Strathcona, Macdonald et Beatty que McConnell accède à ce poste. Toutefois, McConnell ne devint pas chancelier, et ceci est l'histoire qui raconte pourquoi il ne l'est pas devenu. Elle a été publiée sous la forme du chapitre 17 de la biographie de McConnell. Cet article, toutefois, présente considérablement plus de détails.

In some special sense we were a partnership in the development of McGill. I hope that some future historian of the University will realise that—for me personally—his death marks the end of an epoch and leaves me with a realisation that the world is emptier.

—Retired Principal F. Cyril James to Lil McConnell, 29 November 1963

Most probably think of university chancellors as figures of prestige rather than power, if they think about them at all. This is particularly true of universities largely funded by taxes from provinces or states, as McGill has been since the 1950s. It was not true however of McGill in the 1940s, when most of its money came from private sources, and in particular business. McGill was often on the verge of insolvency and demanded business expertise not merely to survive but also to expand. Its Board of Governors had from its start been composed largely of men of business. They elected their own chairman who became by definition the Chancellor. By 1942–3, not all Chancellors had been businessmen but most had, and the increasing dependence of the University on corporate donations, as opposed to gifts from rich individuals, made it more important than before to have a Chancellor highly respected by the business community.

The outgoing Chancellor, Sir Edward Beatty, was certainly such, and he saw as his natural successor John Wilson McConnell (1877–1963), with whom he had long sat on the board of the Bank of Montreal and worked on various fundraising campaigns, in addition to the fact that McConnell had been an extremely effective fundraiser for McGill since 1911 and Governor of the University since 1928. McConnell was also the greatest individual benefactor to McGill from 1920 onwards and probably the richest man in Canada of his time, as well as internationally respected as a self-made man of extraordinary generosity, judgment and perspicacity. Despite all this, he did not become Chancellor, and this is an account of how and why.

Beatty—the president of the Canadian Pacific Railway since 1918 and Chancellor of McGill University since 1920—had been ill with throat trouble and diabetes since December 1939, shortly after the outbreak of war in the previous September. In October 1940, the sinking by the Germans of the pride of the Canadian Pacific fleet, the *RMS Empress of Britain*, was another great blow to him.¹ Nevertheless, he had just managed to perform one last service for the Empire in August. This was his arrangement with Lord Beaverbrook, the Minister of Supply in London, and J.W. McConnell and other businessmen in Montreal, for Canadian Pacific Air Services, a subsidiary of the CPR, to deliver desperately needed American-built bombers to Britain. They went from the officially neutral United States through Montreal under the auspices of the Atlantic Ferry Organization (ATFERO). In 1941, Prime Minister Winston Churchill created RAF Ferry Command to replace the nongovernmental ATFERO. Under Air Chief Marshal Sir Frederick Bowhill at the new airport at Dorval, Ferry Command was to report to Morris Wilson, president of the Royal Bank of Canada and a governor of McGill, but here in his wartime capacity as the representative in North America of the British Ministry of Aircraft Production. This transfer of responsibility to Ferry Command concluded Beatty's principal contribution to

the war effort. In any case, in March 1941, he was largely paralysed with a stroke. He resigned the presidency of the CPR in 1942 but remained chairman of the company until his death in 1943.²

With his stroke, Beatty lost his ability to speak and write. Although he recovered some of his powers in the following months, he became disabled with other illnesses and was confined to his house on Pine Avenue by 1942. Beatty had become a commanding, even an intimidating figure, with many enemies, and very unusually he had worked his way to the top as a litigation lawyer. As the head of the major corporation in the Dominion, Beatty was renowned for his effectiveness, directness and authority. He did not hesitate to summon the governors of McGill to meetings in the boardroom of his head office in Windsor Station rather than at their own boardroom at the University. During Beatty's Chancellorship moreover, two Principals of McGill (by definition also Vice-Chancellors) proved unable to serve a full term. It fell to the Chancellor to try to fill the consequent breaches in the continuity of administration, especially between 1933 and 1939.

Beatty's interventions as de facto Acting Principal coloured the definition of the office of Chancellor from 1920 onwards. With the retirement of Sir William Peterson in 1919, Sir Auckland Geddes, then Minister of National Service in the United Kingdom, had been named Principal. But he never took office, and in 1920 he became instead the British Ambassador to the United States. Although in 1919 Frank Dawson Adams had become Acting Principal in the absence of Geddes, Sir Robert Borden suddenly resigned as Chancellor in 1920, after having served, in succession to Macdonald, for less than two years. McGill in 1920 was thus without leadership of the weight and the distinction that it had only very recently tried to secure.

Having become Chancellor of Queen's University in Kingston only in 1919, Beatty could hardly have coveted the additional duties of being Chancellor of McGill, but he did accept them in the following year. He resigned as Chancellor of Queen's only in 1923, to be succeeded there by the same Sir Robert Borden who had resigned as Chancellor of McGill. Also in 1920, Sir Arthur Currie, perhaps the ablest commander of Imperial forces of the Great War, became Principal and Vice-Chancellor of McGill. For 11 years, Currie seems to have been generally an effective and popular Principal even though dogged by slurs on his reputation as a general up to the armistice of 1918. Currie died in office in 1933. Then for two years, until 1935, McGill was unable to find a Principal to replace him, until William Massey Birks, a governor, proposed Arthur Eustache Morgan, since 1926 the Principal of University College, Hull, in England. Morgan seems to have been unknown to the other governors before his appointment, and in any case he immediately antagonized many, above all Beatty. Why McGill was unable to find a new Principal from 1933 to 1935, and then why it hired and then

fired someone so undistinguished and unsuitable as Morgan, is obscure. In any case, not only had Beatty been largely in charge from the onset of Currie's illness in 1931: he had also personally sacked Morgan in 1937 and he was to resume control until the appointment of Lewis Douglas as Principal in 1938. Lewis lasted barely two years, resigning in 1939 because he felt it inappropriate to retain this position as an American citizen while Canada, but not the United States, was at war. Fortunately, the University was able to turn to its newly appointed director of the School of Commerce, F. Cyril James, to take over, but already, by 1942–3, James's tenure was coming into question.

McGill therefore had to find a new Chancellor as soon as possible, a man of unusual ability but possibly different from Beatty's. Had Arthur Purvis, the self-made businessman and highly regarded president of Canadian Industries Limited (affiliated with Imperial Chemical Industries of England) and already a governor, not been killed in an air accident in August 1940, he might well have been elected to succeed Beatty as both Chancellor and president of the CPR. He had served as chairman of the National Employment Commission in 1936–8 and in this capacity he had developed the reputation as a firm defender of the unemployed and an advocate of unemployment insurance. In 1940, he became Chairman of the Anglo-French Purchasing Commission in North America, but with the fall of France, he became the Director General of the British Supply Commission in North America, responsible for implementing the Lend-Lease Agreement to supply "surplus" American equipment to Britain for the war effort. Purvis was often described as brilliant and charming, especially in Washington, where his negotiations were crucial to the British war effort. In 1940, there was the rumour that he was to be ennobled as a viscount, but instead he was sworn of the British Privy Council, like a cabinet minister.

Although it is unknown precisely who among the McGill governors would have supported Purvis as Chancellor, he clearly stood before his death in some respects in contrast to Beatty, and thus he probably appealed to those yearning for a change of image for the University. In Washington in 1941, Purvis was winning over American officials as probably no Canadian or British representative before had done, and the Americans had now assumed the leadership of the English-speaking world. Purvis was also a tough businessman but with claims to being a humane and an enlightened one. Finally, he was also too busy abroad to be likely to interfere in McGill affairs in ways that critics were complaining of Beatty's Chancellorship.

Among the governors in 1942, one obvious successor, indeed the most obvious to Beatty himself, was J.W. McConnell, perhaps the richest and ablest businessman in the Dominion. He had been on the Board since 1928 and an energetic fundraiser for the University since 1911 as well as its most generous benefactor since the death in 1917 of Sir William Macdonald, the Chancellor since 1914. Beatty

had carried out both his administrative and his ceremonial functions punctiliously, and there was nobody with the authority of his personality and his experience to replace him. The questions for the governors were first what they wanted the new Chancellor to do and secondly whether McConnell could fulfil the functions that they foresaw for the Chancellor.

Although possessed of enormous capacity for hard work and business success, McConnell unlike Beatty shunned open confrontation and was widely respected for his kindness, tact and consideration. He was immensely distinguished in appearance and manner, but modest and almost shy to a fault and yet his devotion to McGill was unquestionable. He had been close to Currie and worked hard on fundraising for various causes with him and with Beatty himself. His attitude towards Morgan is unknown, but his closest friend on the Board was Birks, who had found and promoted Morgan and who indeed was the only governor to see Morgan off to return to England in 1937. McConnell had also been conspicuously supportive of Douglas, who was a seasoned man of business and had resigned as President Roosevelt's Director of the Bureau of the Budget over Roosevelt's decision to abandon the Gold Standard and to indulge in deficit spending. McConnell, finally, seems also to have been behind the hiring of James, who had been a financial historian at the University of Pennsylvania, as both head of the School of Commerce and then as Principal.

It has been suggested by the official McGill historian of its earlier years, Stanley Frost, to the writer that McConnell quietly coveted the Chancellorship. McConnell in fact seems to have desired no position whatever, except perhaps that of the owner of assets and companies. He hated speaking in public, and he often described himself as labouring under a certain sense of inferiority by not having obtained a university education. This admission was probably a reflection of genuine humility in the presence of academic achievement but it was not decisive in his reasoning. Like most of his fellow governors, he did not really believe, in any case, that a university degree was essential for a Chancellor. And so he came rapidly to support the banker Morris Wilson for the position, like McConnell himself another autodidact rather than a university graduate, but also like him an omnivorous reader. Notes for a eulogy, on Wilson's sudden death in May 1946, in McConnell's hand, suggest what McConnell most admired in him. They curiously reflect what others most admired in McConnell:

Always ready with sound advice, Morris was a true and consistent friend whose very presence radiated cheerfulness, goodwill and the spirit of compromise in any difficult situation, however hopeless the outlook might be. He had moreover captured that elusive thing called happiness which all men seek, but find only in selfless service for their less fortunate fellow men. In his long and tireless work for the

Welfare Federation this quality of selflessness stood out above all others. To this humanitarian cause he gave of himself unstintingly to the great benefit of 32 charities embraced by the Federation. His home life was a happy one. He was a devoted and loving husband & father, while his good works shall stand as a memorial to his name. His fine qualities of heart and soul remain as a living example to us all. To me his untimely passing is a grievous personal loss.³

Although apparently not desiring the Chancellorship, McConnell did seem to relish his role as a governor, and he faithfully attended every graduation ceremony at which he was able to be present, from the 1920s until well into the 1950s. His dedication to the university was unquestionable, as was his overwhelming generosity to it. It was therefore unavoidable for him to be considered as a most likely successor to Beatty. But his candidacy immediately met stiff opposition from several of his fellow governors. Their reasons are fairly but not completely clear, and in any case they evolved over time. In the end, two or three of his critics, in particular, prevailed to render his candidacy untenable, at least in the eyes of McConnell himself; and the record reveals that McConnell refused unconditionally two formal offers from the Board of the position.

In the aftermath of the debacle over his reluctant candidacy, it is also true that McConnell appears ruthlessly to have forced the ouster of his two most implacable foes from the Board. Thus he secured even greater authority among those who remained. He was effectively to nominate not only Beatty's successor, Wilson (1943–6); Wilson's successor, O.S. Tyndale (1946–52); Tyndale's successor, B.C. Gardner (1952–7); and finally probably Gardner's successor, McConnell's old friend, R.E. Powell (1957–64). McConnell died in 1963, but even Powell's successor as Chancellor, Howard Ross (1964–70), was a son of one of McConnell's closest colleagues in fundraising for the YMCA in 1909 and for McGill in 1911, J.W. Ross. The question of McConnell's failure to become Chancellor in 1943 discloses therefore something of the character of both McConnell and his fellow governors, and indeed of the tensions of St. James Street, then the business heart of Canada, where personal relationships were at times far frostier than they may have appeared to outsiders.

Although there was undoubtedly personal animosity to him involved, his opponents on the board couched their opposition in terms of their desire for reform of the office of the Chancellor after what they perceived as the highhandedness of Beatty, although they had themselves apparently backed Beatty in his brutal ouster of A.E. Morgan as Principal. In this yearning for a reform of the Chancellorship, they cannot be presumed to be devious or hypocritical, although the ostensible terms of their opposition to McConnell varied considerably. They probably did fervently believe that they were acting in the best interests of the University. It was however not until 1970 that the key principle for which

they had declared they were fighting—the separation of the Chancellorship from the chairmanship of the Board of Governors – was adopted.

Since 1864, the President of the Royal Institution for the Advancement of Learning, in what became in 1867 the Province of Quebec, had been ex officio both Chancellor and Chairman of the Board of Governors of McGill. The Royal Institution dates from 1801, and it was originally established to operate two Royal Grammar Schools and District Public Schools, all established and funded by the Province and essentially nondenominational. McGill College (later University) was incorporated into it 1821. Resistance by the Roman Catholic Church, however, led to a religiously divided system of public education in the Province and to local school boards. Thus a new Royal Charter in 1852 reduced the Royal Institution to running McGill alone and eventually such affiliates of McGill as Macdonald College, Royal Victoria College and the Montreal Neurological Institute. The trustees of the Royal Institution to this day comprise the governors of the University, and its President is still the Chancellor of the University. The Chancellor has remained naturally the ceremonial head of the University, so that the Principal is still called the Vice-Chancellor.

As Chairman of the Board of Governors before 1970 however, the Chancellor also oversaw the financial and administrative affairs. Many saw McConnell as one of the most influential men in St. James Street, if not the most influential; and there had already been much criticism from Frank Scott, of the faculty of law, as well as others, of the domination of the university by such alleged rapacious capitalists. Although they were in fact too varied as businessmen to fit Scott's characterization, there was disquiet even there that McConnell, with the reputation of the most aggressive capitalist of all, might adopt the same sense of entitlement to subservience from them that Beatty had evinced.

The call of some governors opposed to McConnell was therefore for a presumably relatively ineffectual "academic" as the new Chancellor, while some relatively younger man, probably a businessman, would chair the Board. It is not clear however what they meant by an academic. Their most obvious precedent for a Chancellor who was not chairman of a board of university governors was Charles Dunning. He was the non-chairing Chancellor of Queen's who also, unhappily for them, happened to be a distinguished businessman. He was indeed one of McConnell's closest colleagues as president of Ogilvie Flour Mills in succession, in 1940, to McConnell himself.

Dunning, a retired Premier of Saskatchewan and Dominion Minister of Finance, was at any rate himself without a university degree and certainly no academic in the sense of a university teacher. With the exception of Beatty, neither had any previous Chancellor of McGill been one,

including Charles Dewey Day, Senator James Ferrier, Lord Strathcona, Macdonald and Borden. Moreover, the practice of Queen's University, in appointing a Chancellor without the power of chairman, had not deterred its appointment of the pugnacious Beatty himself in 1919. Nor did the opponents of McConnell find a formidable candidate. Their choice was Charles W. Colby, a highly respectable but little-known historian with a Ph.D. who had been pursuing a distinctly non-academic career selling Remington noiseless typewriters, and whose suitability for the Chancellorship was openly deemed by Principal Cyril James and others as risible. Colby was 77, plagued by indifferent health, uninterested in the position, and above all both a supporter and a great friend of McConnell's.

Who were McConnell's opponents on the Board? Two of them were cousins and partners in the accounting firm named after them, McDonald, Currie. George Cross McDonald (1883–1961) had been educated at the High School of Montreal and was a graduate in arts from McGill. His father had been John Macdonald, who – doing the reverse of Sir William Macdonald, formerly McDonald—later changed his name to McDonald, and he was described as a “proud, principled, fiery-tempered, stiff-necked man.”⁴ This John McDonald (1840–1904) had become a founder of the Association of Accountants in Montreal in 1879 (and its first vice-president or president – the records vary—in 1897–8), and also the auditor of the Bank of Montreal and of many other businesses.⁵ As auditor, John McDonald called the distinguished vice-president (later president) of the Bank of Montreal, George (later Sir George) Drummond, “a rogue and a liar,” and he later published verses describing the incident, of which he was perhaps inordinately proud. He is said to have threatened Drummond with a gun, so that Drummond was obliged go about with bodyguards.⁶

George McDonald developed a similar reputation for both probity and ferocity to that earned by his father. He first worked as a bookkeeper for the Anglo-Canadian Leather Company and then decided to become an accountant. This he did in 1909, after articling with the firm of Creak, Cushing & Hodgson, which served as McConnell's firm for decades. A year later, he set up his own practice, sharing his office with Talbot Papineau, a descendant of the rebel Louis-Joseph Papineau, who was to fall in the Great War and whose cult as a good and loyal Canadian McDonald would perpetuate.⁷ McDonald was accustomed to difficult and important work. He helped to settle the estate of a great benefactor to McGill, John Thomas Molson, who had left 60% of Molson's Brewery to his son Herbert, and 40% to his nephew Fred, both of whom eventually sat on the McGill Board with both McConnell and McDonald himself. McDonald was also to train two of the Molsons in accountancy, John and Hartland, both of whom also became governors. In 1911, McDonald's cousin, George Selkirk Currie (born in 1889), joined him as his partner; and their firm grew steadily thereafter.

Soon after the start of the Great War, both McDonald and Currie joined the newly created Princess Patricia's Light Infantry regiment raised by Major (later Brigadier) Hamilton Gault. McDonald and Captain Percival Molson were in command of a company of reinforcements from McGill, and Currie was one of the four platoon commanders. George Creak and his firm took over their audits in their absence. Both McDonald and Currie won the Military Cross; and Currie won also the Distinguished Service Order, to be followed after the Second World War by the Companionship of the Order of St. Michael and St. George.⁸ McDonald had been severely wounded twice and was invalided, but Currie emerged as Deputy Assistant Quarter Master General of the 4th Canadian Division. For the remainder of their lives, they were addressed as Major McDonald and Colonel Currie, taking as their new battlegrounds both St. James Street and McGill. If McConnell with his many directorships, until his retirement from most of them in 1937, occupied the summit of Canadian business, these two accountants were determined to remind him that he had enemies. Their careers illustrate how the McGill Board was for long an extension of St. James Street and its rivalries.

After the war, in 1919–20, McDonald investigated the bankruptcy of Thornton Davidson, the largest brokers on the Montreal Stock Exchange. These brokers were associated with the insolvent Merchants' Bank, being investigated by his cousin Currie, which eventually had to be bailed out by the Bank of Montreal, following prosecution of its principals. McConnell had been associated with Thornton Davidson, the founder of the firm, until he went down with the *Titanic* in 1912, and even more closely with Sir Montagu Allan, when he was president of the Merchants' Bank. Notwithstanding the previous feud between John McDonald and George Drummond, George McDonald then followed in the precedent set by his father by becoming auditor to the Bank of Montreal, of which Sir George's son, Huntly Redpath Drummond, was president in 1939–42 and of which McConnell was long a director. So central had McDonald become to the Street that he was elected president of the Montreal Board of Trade in 1929, and chairman of the executive committee of the Canadian Chamber of Commerce in 1930–1.⁹ With the abandonment of the gold standard by the United Kingdom in 1931 and the consequent ruin of much of St. James Street, he administered the bankruptcy of the brokerage house of Greenshields. McConnell was simultaneously bailing out MacDougall and Cowans, ensuring its survival as the only insolvent firm to survive on St. James Street.

McDonald also developed an interest in politics. He advised Quebec on its response to the Rowell-Sirois Royal Commission on Dominion-Provincial fiscal relations, and he served on a royal commission on the relations between the Dominion and Saskatchewan and Alberta. He sat on the Quebec Electricity Commission (the Lapointe Commission) on the future of private utilities in 1934–5, and he taught

part-time at the School of Commerce of McGill. In 1934, with Herbert Molson and Paul Sise, he conducted an audit of all of the finances of McGill.

Then his friend (and ten years later McConnell's) Maurice Duplessis came to power in Quebec in 1936. From 1937 to 1940 McDonald served as a member of the Quebec Taxation Revision Bureau, known as the Montpetit Commission. He developed a very close working relationship with Duplessis, and also with Mayor Camillien Houde, the Mayor of Montreal. Most significantly, in 1944 he became the first vice-chairman of the Quebec Hydro-Electric Commission, appointed by Premier Adélard Godbout and reconfirmed by Duplessis on his resumption of the premiership from 1944 until 1959. The purpose of Quebec Hydro, as it was popularly known, was to run the newly expropriated Montreal Light, Heat and Power Consolidated, which had exercised a largely effective monopoly over power on the Island of Montreal since 1901. McConnell had served as a director of this private utility from 1925 and had been a major investor in it for much longer, and he had fiercely opposed its nationalization by Godbout. It was McConnell's quickly made fortune, as chiefly earned from various private electrical utilities from 1909 onwards, in addition to his controversial take-over of St. Lawrence Sugar in 1912–15, that had inspired mistrust and envy of him on the Street.

The reasons for Currie's opposition to McConnell are less clear. He became prominent on the Board only after the failure of McConnell's candidacy, when he led the attack on the Principalship of James, McConnell's ally. In 1940, he had become executive assistant to Col. J.L. Ralston, the Minister of National Defence, who had been a critic of McConnell's since McConnell's controversial takeover of the Halifax Electric Tramway in 1909. In 1941, Ralston appears to have been behind the vetoing of the appointment of McConnell as the Canadian Ambassador to Washington. In 1942, Currie rose to become Deputy Minister of National Defence (Army), but he was to return eventually to rejoin his accountancy partnership with McDonald. In summary, McDonald and Currie were at least as much part of St. James Street and the Canadian establishment as McConnell, and to all appearances men of the highest sense of public duty. McDonald's speeches reveal him to have been the soberest of men, incisive and selfless and possessed of vigorous and broad sympathies. But he seems also to have been, outside his speeches, unusually obstreperous and even violently quarrelsome, as can be seen presently, and it very much appears that his clash with McConnell was an issue of personality at least as much as of principle.

Certainly McDonald was a plotter, and evidence of his plotting abounds. McGill and especially its affiliated hospitals were well served by volunteers ambitious to make a name for themselves by doing good works, which sometimes led to seats on the Board. In March 1942, for example, Cyril James confided to his diary that John Newman¹⁰ was complaining

to him that McDonald, with George Hogg and a Mr. Hutchison,¹¹ was trying to oust Newman as president of the Montreal General Hospital. McDonald wanted to replace Newman with Matty Ogilvie,¹² and then ultimately to instal a Mr. Elder¹³ as vice-president. But that very morning, Newman, James recorded, had also just "taken the skin off Ogilvie" himself; and Hogg also had had a "violent argument" with McDonald, and now Newman "intended to throw McDonald Currie from all the corporations with which he was associated."¹⁴ McDonald felt Newman to be incompetent as president of the hospital, and was further outraged when Newman then took a seat on the McGill Board, although such a seat had traditionally been reserved for any president of the Montreal General.

McConnell had made the hospitals of Montreal, especially those affiliated with McGill, his special interest, and his service and generosity to them, especially as chairman of the Joint Hospital fundraising campaign of 1927, had rendered his position on the McGill Board unassailable even by McDonald, not least because he had worked so hard on this campaign and subsequently for the hospitals with Col. Herbert Molson and with Beatty himself. Uniquely, McConnell was on the boards of the Royal Victoria and the Montreal General Hospitals, traditional rivals, as well as a principal founder with Sir Herbert Holt (long the president of Montreal Light, Heat and Power) of the Montreal Neurological Institute. He was a founder of the maternity wing of the Royal Victoria Hospital and for years the chairman of its annual charity ball, a major event in the Montreal social calendar. Combined with his vast experience of fundraising also for McGill itself, for Victory Loans during the Great War, and much else as well as the hospitals, his preparation for the Chancellorship was unimpeachable.

At the end of March 1942, with Beatty's health rapidly failing, Principal James finally approached McConnell about assuming the Chancellorship, confiding that Beatty agreed with him that McConnell was "the only appropriate person for the job." McConnell replied that he did not like making speeches, but James responded that Beatty had made few speeches and Sir William Macdonald none. McConnell was noncommittal, but James felt "reasonably certain that he would accept."¹⁵ James then went to McDonald, who claimed that he (McDonald), Col. Allan Magee, Walter Molson¹⁶, S.G. Blaylock, Ross Clarkson, G.W. Spinney and Senator Knatchbull-Hugessen and other governors would all oppose McConnell. McConnell, McDonald said, was "too overbearing" and McGill "definitely did not want another Chancellor who mixed himself up with administration." James denied that Beatty had ever done this "when there was anybody there to do it for him," but McDonald insisted that an "academic man" of "outstanding eminence" was needed, and he proposed C.W. Colby.¹⁷ Colby for James was insufficiently eminent and even ludicrous, and James insisted that McGill needed someone that was a household name in Canada, the

United States and Great Britain, certainly not someone as absent from Montreal as Colby tended to be. McDonald retorted that all the Chancellor should do was to preside over Convocation, and leave the chairmanship of the governors to a junior businessman, as at Queen's.¹⁸

After James had discussed McDonald's position with Dr. W.W. Chipman, he recorded that he had never seen Chipman "so alarmed in my life."¹⁹ James was convinced that McDonald himself wanted to be both Principal and chairman of the Board while "Colby was now a dear old person whom nobody could object to in the least" could serve as Chancellor. Chipman went to see W.M. Birks and Huntly Drummond and he concluded that ten governors, of the total of 26, would support McConnell and seven would support McDonald. Gordon Pitts called for a campaign on behalf McConnell.²⁰ Morris Wilson however, calculated the Board as evenly split about McConnell, with only four or five governors "violently opposed" to him. If there were in fact great enthusiasm for an academic Chancellor, Wilson would propose suggesting Chipman or Dr. Alfred Bazin to split the Colby vote.²¹

On the next day, McConnell himself told James that he had decided to decline the Chancellorship. James entreated him to reconsider as he, James, was "very eager" to have him, and all the members of the executive committee, apart from McDonald, wanted him. James suggested seeing first whether the Board preferred an academic Chancellor and then whether it contained a substantial recalcitrant minority. McConnell insisted that "he did not want anybody to think that he was standing round waiting for it," but also that he "would be very glad to have me keep his refusal up my sleeve to use as I wished to." If the University really needed him, he would take the position, "although his wife and family were strongly against it and he himself was by no means eager to take on further responsibilities."²²

Then the executive and finance committee voted to add Fred Southam,²³ Walter Molson and Bazin to its number to consider the Chancellorship. James pointed out to McDonald that Lewis Douglas, James's predecessor as Principal, and McDonald himself had approved altering the statutes to make the Chancellor in no sense academic, and the Principal as executive head and university administrator. In a private conversation after the meeting, McDonald insisted that "he had no quarrel at all" with James, but he complained that the old guard on the Board, particularly McConnell's friend Birks, had done nothing for years.

Paul Sise²⁴ told James that he, Southam and Molson felt that Colby, presumably because he seemed so inoffensive, would be the best Chancellor for the next two or three years, following which they would accept McConnell. Sise noted that active campaigning by Birks and McDonald, respectively for and against McConnell, had "very nearly produced bitter dissension" on the Board. James replied that the real contribution that a Chancellor could make over the next

five or ten years was to "bring the University money enough to enable us to achieve our ideals." McConnell could do this and was also persona grata with the provincial government and well known outside Canada, whereas Colby might be thought a "joke."²⁵

By June of the following year, 1943, Beatty having finally died in March, the question of the Chancellorship was both more urgent than ever and still awaiting solution. Southam had declared himself to James in favour of McConnell, and Deans Brittain, Mesurier and Macmillan had expressed themselves very worried by the prospect of Colby. Colby said to James that—at 77—he felt himself too old for the position, and that he himself supported McConnell and that G.W. Spinney should take the Chancellorship if the opposition to McConnell proved too great.²⁶ But then McConnell declared that he had, upon reconsideration, decided definitely not to accept and that he would prefer instead the presidency of the Royal Victoria Hospital, which would be less onerous. James reminded McConnell that Beatty had been holding both this particular presidency and the Chancellorship simultaneously, and he said that McConnell's own preference for the Chancellorship, Morris Wilson, was not yet ready.²⁷

On June 30, 1943 the fourth meeting of the special committee on the Chancellorship was held at the Mount Royal Club. The written nominations were counted. Colby was the first choice of five, and suggested by two others, for a total of seven. McConnell was the first choice of 12 and suggested by three others, for a total of 15. Wilson was the first choice of one, and suggested by eight others, for a total of nine. Spinney was suggested by four. The others suggested were W.M. Birks, Dr. W.W. Chipman, Dr. C.F. Martin, A.B. Wood, Walter Molson, S.G. Blaylock,²⁸ Huntly Drummond, Chief Justice Sir Lyman Duff, Prime Minister Mackenzie King, and Mr. Justice W.L. Bond. Colby wrote to urge McConnell as Chancellor or, failing him, Drummond, Wilson or Spinney. The committee — Bazin, Birks, Chipman, Southam and Spinney, with James in the chair, and all of them friends of McConnell—unanimously decided on McConnell. McDonald, who was away on a fishing trip, later complained bitterly that they had changed the rules for making a decision. Nevertheless, the committee still found that of the other governors the following remained opposed to McConnell: Ross Clarkson,²⁹ Huntly Drummond, George McDonald, Hugh Crombie,³⁰ S.G. Blaylock and Senator Adrian Knatchbull-Hugessen.³¹ Given McConnell's expressed reluctance, the committee felt strongly that unanimity, or near unanimity, was necessary before approaching him again.

Through July, James himself lobbied for McConnell's candidacy, and in the end he found only McDonald and Hugessen absolutely opposed. Hugessen declared that he thought that McGill would be making "a serious mistake, that it was selling its birthright for a mess of pottage" in considering McConnell. Molson, hitherto in league with McDonald, said that he was willing to vote for McConnell

after the withdrawal of Colby.³² On the morning of July 13, the crisis came to a head with two meetings of the special committee and the visit of a delegation (James, Chipman, Wilson and Wood) to McConnell. McConnell had reiterated his refusal, but James still felt that he would accept a formal invitation from the majority of the governors. McDonald, James found, was “damnably eager to postpone the whole business for three months”, and Southam was willing to agree. McDonald offered to resign from the special committee if the others insisted on unanimity but he was urged to reconsider.

W.M. Birks had obtained McConnell’s agreement to accept the Chancellorship only six weeks before, in a private conversation. His letter to James on July 13 after hearing the news captures his indignation:

I cannot but feel that your Committee in striving to please an over-critical small minority (some of whom won’t play unless they get their way) has been unwise and with tragic results.

Academic snobbery has lost to McGill the best man in Canada, and somebody bears a heavy responsibility; for his genuine interest (direct and indirect) would have meant many millions.

They quote Sir William Mulock as Chancellor at Toronto, but Varsity is supported by the Ontario Government. If McGill could live on the Quebec Government, appoint my friend, Chief Justice Bond, and confine the Governors to academicians and “let George [McDonald?] thumb his nose at ‘St. James Street.’”

Charlie Dunning, Chancellor of Queen’s, never even saw the inside of a high school!

From James McGill, Redpath, Molson, Strathcona and Macdonald onward, McGill must depend on financial Montreal,—first our fur traders and railway kings, then our bankers and merchant princes of the English-speaking minority, and none of them graduates.

When I joined this financial board 33 years ago, it was smaller, but we had (1911/12) 12 financial (non-grads) to four graduates, and 30 years later (’42) the former had sunk to 7 and the latter risen to 15.³³ In my humble opinion this proportion should be reversed.

There has been steady pressure ever since to appoint graduates, but I did not think that I would live to hear two members say openly, “only academicians” and scorn “St. James St.”

The Board is rapidly shaping so that no mere financial man would feel comfortable upon it, in which case we have damned McGill.³⁴

On the following day, the governors continued to do battle. Wilson wanted to send another delegation to McConnell, but Chipman and Wood declared that he would not change his mind. Hugessen and McDonald repeated their adamant opposition, and McDonald added that he would rather have Samuel Bronfman as Chancellor for 10 years than McConnell for five years.³⁵ Southam and Wilson proposed a delay of three months, which was carried. James felt very bitter that he had failed to tackle McDonald to get “rid” of him “for good”, but also that McConnell’s continued expressions of refusal had undermined him. Even Birks, one of McConnell’s closest friends, wrote to James that he (Birks) was on record as favouring a Lord Rector, as at the Scottish universities, a non-resident world figure, for McGill, such as the provincial University of Toronto could not have. He also commented on three of the opponents of McConnell, combined with the lack of disdain held by at least two of them for his money:

Colonel Magee (whom I so admire) wishes to appoint such a figure [as a Lord Rector] as Chancellor, but would not object to McConnell doing the work, give or secure the cash, but deny him the honour,—very nice, but it won’t work!

Senator Hugessen also wishes a big academic figure as in England and Toronto, where the Government finances the Universities. McGill is not in England or Ontario.

McDonald insists on calling the tune – also with condescension will permit McConnell to pay the piper – nice, but it won’t work!³⁶

In the end, it seems that McConnell’s candidacy failed for various reasons. Chief among them was that McConnell genuinely did not want the position much, if at all. He had long been probably the richest man in Canada and retired from nearly all of his many boards, except at McGill, in 1937, and he was not in the least interested in honours or in honorary positions. By now Southam, a close friend, said that McConnell was “not a strong man”, presumably physically. Under pressure from his wife Lil, who was concerned about his health, McConnell had already declined the offer of a seat in the Dominion cabinet in 1940. He also remained a very busy man; and when he told James that he would prefer the presidency of the Royal Victoria Hospital, he alluded to the fact that that position would require only sporadic bouts of activity to raise money for new buildings. In any case, as subsequent events would reveal, he was perfectly happy, without the Chancellorship, to continue to contribute financially to the University, and even more to raise money for it in 1943. Thus speculation about his motivation even by some of his friends, that he was secretly yearning for the Chancellorship in return for his benefactions, was to be abundantly proved as wrong.

The most interesting question is why McDonald was so opposed to him. His opposition probably dated back to

McConnell's bitter and brilliant takeover of what became the Montreal Tramways franchise in 1909–12, and the subsequent battles over transit, and then a related electrical-power franchise that raged in Quebec up to 1925. Many had concluded at the time that McConnell was dishonest, especially in his financing of this takeover, just as he had been previously widely accused of dishonesty in his takeover of St. Lawrence Sugar in 1912–5.³⁷ Montreal Tramways was run by a provincially appointed commission from 1915 onwards although it remained a privately owned company. In 1925, the electrical interests financed by McConnell and others in 1909–12 were taken over by their competitors, Montreal Light, Heat and Power and Shawinigan Water and Power, who ran a virtual duopoly over the supply of power to much of the province. McConnell joined the board of Montreal Light, Heat and Power and became a major shareholder of it and ally of its president since 1901, Sir Herbert Holt, another governor of McGill, who however died in 1941. Long before McDonald was sitting on the Lapointe commission on the future of the privately owned power utilities of Quebec in 1934–5, Montreal Light, Heat and Power had become the most hated monopoly – and symbol of English-speaking domination of the economy—that Quebec nationalists were determined to expropriate. But the Lapointe commission had concluded that the province could not afford to buy out the shareholders of any of the privately owned utilities in the province.

In the ten years that followed, a consensus emerged in the province that the requisite funds could be found, determined by a commission to estimate the fair value of the shares, at least of Montreal Light, Heat and Power, with Shawinigan Water and Power not to be expropriated until almost 20 years later. McConnell bitterly fought what he saw as the undervaluation of his shares in Montreal, Light, Heat and Power, but the expropriation of the company proceeded under Premier Godbout in 1944. And even after Duplessis had resumed power in the same year he did nothing to reverse this expropriation. Ever the rebel, even against St. James Street, McDonald,—as already mentioned—became one of the first members of the Quebec Hydro-Electric Commission, which took over the assets of Montreal Light, Heat and Power. This was only months after the struggle over the Chancellorship of McGill had concluded. Quebec Hydro, as the Commission became better known, was the antithesis of what McConnell had fought against for most of his life, namely State as opposed to free enterprise. Although McDonald never mentioned the battle over Montreal Light, Heat and Power, in the context of McConnell's candidacy for the Chancellorship, this battle probably decisively coloured the unyielding hostility between the two men, and by extension between McConnell and McDonald's cousin Currie.

The opposition of Hugessen is even more intriguing. He was a younger son of Lord Brabourne and the son-in-law of G.H. Duggan, who had presumably been close to McConnell

on the board of Dominion Bridge. He was also the senior partner of the law firm that Peter Laing, McConnell's son-in-law, was to join in 1944. The only Old Etonian in the Canadian Senate, Hugessen was particularly proud of his own noble birth, and it appears that he found McConnell overbearing for someone of such relatively humble birth. Apart from McDonald, Currie and Hugessen, none of the governors remained opposed to McConnell to the end, but McConnell still declined the Chancellorship, to the dismay of James.

For a while after McConnell had withdrawn however, a threat remained on the board. Frustrated in his efforts to reduce the role of the Chancellor, McDonald then openly turned against Principal James, who had been quietly fighting for McConnell as Chancellor all along, and he lobbied the governors for James's ouster. Dorothy McMurray, who had faithfully served as secretary to Principals Currie, Morgan, Douglas and James, had seen the spitefulness and destructiveness in McDonald's character over the decades. She urged James to carry on.

McDonald found little support for his campaign against James, and he resigned from the Board in considerable bitterness. Then McDonald's cousin and partner George Currie took up the campaign against James. McConnell supported James throughout Currie's campaign against him, to the point of supplementing James's salary when it appeared that the Principal might be leaving for the presidency of the University of Pennsylvania. At the crucial meeting of the governors to confirm James as Principal, McConnell made a resounding speech, and a very curious one. He attributed to James every success of the University, for which McConnell himself was actually responsible. It could hardly have been lost on the governors that McConnell was actually reminding them of what the University, and indeed James himself, owed to him. Whether he was also hinting at his own resignation if James were to go is not so clear. But it seems fair to conclude that he did not want to work with any other Principal, and as usual his will prevailed. McConnell boxed in Currie, who found himself forced to resign in defeat.

McConnell himself alluded to the resignations of the two cousins, McDonald and Currie, in a letter to James many years later:

I shall not soon forget the merry fight in a certain quarter with respect to the election of the late Morris Wilson as Chancellor [instead of McConnell], and the most disagreeable and spiteful speech delivered against you, resulting in a resignation [by G.C. McDonald]. Nor the event later on where an inside man [G.S. Currie] made the unbelievable declaration that 50% of the Governors would like to see you go.

At your request, and upon your withdrawal from the meeting, I took the Chair and poled [sic] the Board one by one so that each member would express his



The McGill Board of Governors with honorary graduates and M.W. Wilson, the new Chancellor, in May 1944. Back: J.W. Ross, A.B. Wood, H.R. Drummond, W.M. Birks, J.W. McConnell, C.W. Colby, W.W. Chipman. Front: Principal F.C. James, E.A. Graham, T. Rinfret, G.F. Towers, E.M. Cameron, M.W. Wilson. McGill University Archives, PR014113

views on the subject without persuasion, which resulted in 100% vote of confidence for you. I have no reason to believe that any of them have since changed their minds.³⁸

In an apparent reference to Currie, McConnell also remarked in a footnote to this letter: “This resulted in another resignation, though a bit slow in coming. Loyalty cannot be bought at a price — but where it exists, it is well worth rewarding.” He and James remained loyal to each other, and though they had their differences, some very serious, they together were to steer McGill through some of its most trying years.

McConnell let no alleged hard feelings over the issue of his candidacy for the Chancellorship detract from his commitment to McGill, even for a day. Throughout the many months through which the governors were debating his candidacy, he continued to work closely with James on acquiring new properties for the University and on preparing them for new uses. After the question of the Chancellorship had been settled, he maintained the same pace. He found inspiration in, and he felt humbled by, the selflessness and the sacrifices of those fighting the war. They seemed to confirm what had been his long-held view of salvation was to be found through faith or through works or through some combination of them. He saw his own work on the home front as minor in comparison with that of those in battle. But each was still obliged to do his or her part. As he put it to his relatives in California, the Wasserboehrs, at the end of 1942:

The story of this life and death struggle with U-boats, floating mines and Nazi raiders will perhaps never be told. Apart from the miraculous defence of Great Britain where the R.A.F. smashed the much vaunted Nazi Air Force, the story of sea mastery by British and Canadian Navies, and the great Merchant Marine, is beyond the powers of comprehension. It is the most incredible story of heroism and achievement the world has ever known.

To me, Hitler is the personification of Satan at work on earth, bringing trials and suffering worse than death to innocent people wherever his evil hand is felt. Our fight is surely a righteous crusade against the powers of darkness. “By their works ye shall know them.” Faith without works is dead.³⁹

While ultimately declining the Chancellorship, McConnell agreed with Birks that McGill still could not survive without strong support from St. James Street, as even with such support the University was only barely viable. There was moreover no prospect of the level of government support for McGill comparable to that enjoyed by the University of Toronto, a problem that McConnell himself would address several years later. Since 1909, McConnell had been deeply concerned about the solvency of McGill, and he now realized that heavy taxation had made the university more reliant on

corporate donations than on those from rich individuals such as himself. He therefore successfully proposed his old friend Morris Wilson, the president of the Royal Bank of Canada, and also not a graduate, as the next Chancellor.⁴⁰ Wilson may have been his choice all along.

Moreover, McConnell himself was to remain the kingmaker of the next two, or perhaps even more, Chancellors, and the power behind their throne.⁴¹ His power derived from his continued generosity to the university, which actually increased after his refusal of the Chancellorship, and he became more active than ever in rescuing it from various crises, the first emerging in the very same year. Single-handed, he went to corporations all over the city and the country and solicited crucial donations from them that were to keep the university afloat for years to come.

The failure of McConnell to be elected Chancellor seems to demonstrate that he was not the undisputed leader of either St. James Street or the governors, not merely up to Beatty’s death in 1943 but also afterwards. McDonald himself was a St. James Street accountant, despite his barbs about McConnell and the Street, and even after his resignation and Currie’s, Hugessen, himself a St. James Street lawyer, remained on the Board. For all its apparent homogeneity in representing St. James Street, the Board did not in private speak with one voice. It was by the 1940s already reflecting an effort to create a new place for the university in an increasingly nationalistic province, McDonald worked hard with Premiers Duplessis and Godbout, and McConnell himself had supported Godbout over Duplessis because of Duplessis’ opposition to the war effort. When later, from 1946 to about 1956, McConnell himself cultivated Duplessis to ensure provincial funding for McGill he was widely accused of being in collusion with the Premier for private gain. This accusation does not stand up under examination, and in fact the liaison between the two men was Judge Thomas Tremblay, the chairman of a provincial royal commission on relations with the Dominion, whose report foreshadowed much of the “Quiet Revolution” that was to follow in the sixties. Duplessis preferred to describe himself as a Quebec autonomist rather than nationalist, but it was he that instituted the provincial flag, in 1948, that was to become the most potent symbol of Quebec nationalism. Tremblay moreover was also chairman of the commission to evaluate the shares of Montreal Tramways, prior to its expropriation in 1949, thus bringing to a close the private ownership of this utility organized by McConnell in 1909–12. McConnell was thus above all resolutely pragmatic, to the point of assiduously courting those to whom he might have been thought least sympathetic, but always with the goal of ensuring the welfare of McGill.

When the question of the Chancellorship had been settled in 1943, McConnell was named the first “Senior Governor.” In this position, he happily played a relatively discreet and yet tirelessly helpful role for McGill as a whole for almost two more decades. He was content indeed quietly to wield

seldom-questioned influence over the Board thereafter, but never to wield it for his self-aggrandizement. From 1943, almost to his death 20 years later, McConnell was – despite such enemies as Frank Scott—the most constructive force, and the ultimate arbiter, for McGill. As such, he was a worthy successor to Sir Edward Beatty, but unencumbered by the ceremonial burdens of the Chancellorship. By the end of the twentieth century, he had still been the only senior governor, and then governor emeritus, of the University, a fact that testifies to the uniqueness of his role.

Notwithstanding his failure to become Chancellor, McConnell ascended in importance at McGill from 1943 onwards, not because he commanded the undivided allegiance of the Board, but because he generally commanded the undivided allegiance of James. There was a curious alliance, and there is no real warmth in the extensive surviving correspondence between the two men. They were however complementary in their skills and united by their devotion to the University. James, though a hard and conscientious worker and a professor of finance, and perhaps a great Principal, had no gift for fundraising. McConnell of course had this gift in abundance, but within the academic community he was no consensus-builder, which James was. They also possessed a shared vision for the University, as an internationally known centre particularly in the sciences and medicine, despite their falling-out over the question of federal funding for it. James was probably the more profound thinker of the two, and a man of broader sympathies, although not necessarily by far.

In any case, on the essential role of McGill James fundamentally agreed with McConnell. This role had been evolving since 1918 and it was one that the Board was generally to subscribe to for the next four decades. Although seldom explicitly articulated in words, it became clear in the hiring policy of the University, with an emphasis on men of international reputation, such as Wilder Penfield. As McGill was not a provincial university like the University of Toronto it felt little obligation to depend largely on local talent. In any case, most Quebec academics and researchers would probably be drawn to the French-speaking universities of the province, and so McGill had little choice but to draw upon its connections in the British Empire and in English-speaking North America in particular. In so doing, it was likely to enhance higher education in the province more generally, and to assert effectively the crucial part that English Montreal had to play in the educational and more broadly cultural development of Quebec. That it was not a fanciful vision is proved by the fact that, even at the start of the twentieth-first century McGill remains probably the best-known Canadian university abroad, notwithstanding the relatively greater wealth and size of the University of Toronto. At every stage and in every way McConnell was at the heart of the unfolding of this vision in tangible form.

ENDNOTES

Some of the research for this article was used in the writing of chapter 17 of William Fong, *J.W. McConnell: Financier, Philanthropist, Patriot* (Montreal, Kingston, London and Ithaca: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2008). Since the research on which this article is based was done, most of the McConnell Papers used and many others have been deposited at the McGill University Archives (MUA) as the J.W. McConnell Fonds, MG 4240. The other chief primary sources in these Archives, used for this article, are the papers of Principal F. Cyril James and the Minutes of the Board of Governors.

¹This same liner had transported the McConnells and two of their children to India in 1936.

²Sir Edward Wentworth Beatty (1877–1943) was only a few months younger than McConnell. He attended Upper Canada College and the University of Toronto. In 1901, he joined the CPR as general counsel, and he spent his entire career with it. He was created a Knight Grand Cross of the Order of the British Empire in 1935. The only biography of Beatty is D.R. Miller-Barstow, *Beatty and the C.P.R.* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1951). For this article, copies of his outgoing letters, in the archives of the CPR while in Montreal, have been consulted.

³McConnell Papers, undated notes, but undoubtedly from 1946 when Wilson died. McConnell was one of his honorary pallbearers at Wilson's funeral at St. James United Church. His eulogy, slightly altered, is reproduced on p. 20 of an "In Memoriam" booklet, a special issue of the *Royal Bank Magazine*, published after the funeral, a copy of which is also in the McConnell Papers.

⁴Campbell W. Leach, *Coopers & Lybrand in Canada: a chronicle of the McDonald, Currie years 1910–1973* (privately printed by Coopers & Lybrand, 1976), p. 3 of the prologue. Mr. Warren Chippindale has kindly provided copies of certain of McDonald's addresses, with the assistance of Coopers & Lybrand).

⁵It received its provincial charter in 1880. The association was the first formal accountancy organization in North America, preceded only by those in Edinburgh (1854), Glasgow (1855), and Aberdeen (1867), and practically incorporated simultaneously with the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales (1880). It preceded the American Society of Public Accountants by seven years. The Dominion Association of Chartered Accountants began in 1910, promoted by A.F. Riddell and J.W. Ross, also of Montreal. The preeminence of the Montreal Association suggests the significance of both Scotsmen and accountants in Montreal at the time. Among the 13 chartered accountants of the Association was Philip S. Ross, whose firm (P.S. Ross & Sons, founded in 1858) later became part of Touche, Ross & Co. J.W. and J.G. Ross, also accountants and closely connected to McConnell, were of the same family. In 1927, the Association became the Society of Chartered Accountants of the Province of Quebec. By the 1940s, there were more than six separate organizations of accountants in Quebec, however. In 1946, the provincial legislature changed the name of the Society to the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Quebec and gave it the exclusive right to license Chartered Accountants. The Institute absorbed the other accountancy organizations. (See Edgar Andrew Collard, *First in North America, One Hundred Years in the Life of the Ordre des Comptables Agréés du Québec* (Montreal: privately printed, 1980) and George C. McDonald, "The Development of Accountancy in Montreal and a History of the Firm" (Magog: unpublished typescript, 1946).)

⁶*Coopers & Lybrand in Canada*, p. 2. The story of the gun is part of the tradition of the Drummond family. The violent reputation of Montreal business life persisted at least into the 1930s, when Sir Herbert Holt is said to have needed four armed guards to surround him as he walked from his house on Stanley Street to the Power Building on Craig Street. Holt is also said to have been shot in his bath, by the broker W.E. Luther in about 1933, who later fatally shot himself while not realizing that Holt was going to survive.

⁷Major Talbot Papineau, MC, of Princess Patricia's Light Infantry, killed at Passchendaele in 1917, grandson of Louis-Joseph Papineau and cousin of Henri Bourassa, friend of Alfred Baumgarten and became a model heroic French Canadian among English Montrealers after the First World War, and was invoked by McDonald during the conscription crisis of the Second:

see his “Leadership for a United Canada: The Position of the Province of Quebec, the Effect of the Political System on our Confederation and the War Effort of Canada” (unpublished typescript, 18 November 1942). McConnell shared fully McDonald’s dismay at the fact that more non-French soldiers than French ones had enlisted even from Quebec alone by May 1942.

⁸The firm seems to have favoured decorated ex-servicemen. Among the partners it admitted in 1924 were two other holders of the Military Cross, Kenneth Blackader of the Black Watch (later a Brigadier, CBE and DSO) and J.A. de Lalanne (later Brigadier, CBE, Vice-Adjutant General of the Department of National Defence (Army) and Mayor of Westmount).

⁹On his subsequent appointment as president of the Canadian Chamber of Commerce, the *Winnipeg Tribune* (15 September 1937) described him as “Canadian, done in granite” and “a ruthless critic of incompetence and crookedness, governmental or private”.

¹⁰Born in Montreal in 1878, Newman had been president of General Steel Wares Limited since 1927 and of other companies, and he was a director of the Canadian Bank of Commerce, Baldwins Limited of England, the Montreal Trust Company, the Sherwin-Williams Company of Canada Limited, the Carter-White Lead Company of Canada Limited, Canadian Car and Foundry Limited, Price Brothers Company Limited, the Hamilton Bridge Company Limited, and the Anglo-Canadian Telephone Company. He was president of the Montreal General Hospital and of the Verdun Protestant Hospital for the Insane, and a director of the Boys’ Farm and Training School as well as a governor of McGill.

¹¹Col. Paul Phelps Hutchison, ED, KC, LLD, DCL of Heward, Holden, Hutchison, Cliff, McMaster & Meighen.

¹²Lt.-Col. William Watson Ogilvie, grandson of W.W. of Ogilvie Flour Mills, who eventually did become president of the Montreal General.

¹³Aubrey Huntingdon Elder, KC, of Wainwright, Elder & McDougall, born in Huntingdon, Quebec, in 1889, president of the National Drug and Chemical Company of Canada Ltd., and a director of the Prudential Insurance Company of America, the Miner Rubber Co. Ltd., James B. Stetson (Canada), Ltd., the Amalgamated Electric Corporation Ltd., the Canadian Bronze Co. Ltd., and the Guarantee Company of North America.

¹⁴MUA, MG1017, C49, James diary files, 3 March 1942.

¹⁵MUA, MG1017, C49, James diary files, 30 March 1942.

¹⁶Born in 1883, son of John Thomas Molson, Walter Molson established Molson, Lobley & Co. Ltd., real-estate, insurance and financial agents in 1911, and was a director of the Montreal District and Savings, Bank, the Dominion Oilcloth and Linoleum com. Ltd., Remington Rand. Ltd. (Canada), the National Trust Company, the Lake of the Woods Milling Co. Ltd., the Dominion Glass Co. Ltd., the Reliance Insurance Company of Canada, Goulds Pump Inc., the Standard Life Assurance Company and other companies. He had been president of the Canadian Club of Montreal and of the Montreal Board of Trade.

¹⁷Charles W. Colby, PhD, DCL, LLD, born in Stanstead, Quebec, in 1867, and educated at Stanstead College, McGill and Harvard, was a director of the Canadian Bank of Commerce, Moore Corporation Limited, the Dominion Wire Rope and Cable Co., the F.N. Burt Co., the American Sales Book Co., and the Pacific Manifolding Co., and vice-president of Asbestos Corporation Ltd. and the Goulds Pump Co., as well as chairman of the Remington Rand Co. With strong Methodist antecedents, he was a friend of McConnell’s.

¹⁸MUA, MG1017, C49, James diary files, 2 April 1942.

¹⁹Walter William Chipman BA (Acadia), MB, MD (Edinburgh) (1866–1950), born in Wolfville, Nova Scotia, became professor of gynaecology at McGill in 1910. In 1926–9, he was the first director of the Women’s Pavilion of the Royal Victoria Hospital. He was a governor of McGill from 1932 to 1947.

²⁰MUA, MG1017, C49, James diary file, 1 and 2 April 1942.

²¹MUA, MG1017, C49, James diary file, 10 May 1942. Alfred Turner Bazin, DSO, MD, CM, born in Montreal in 1872, and educated at McGill, had been Lieutenant-Colonel in the 3rd Canadian General Hospital in the Great War and was now a surgeon in private practice. His wife was a sister

of Milton Hersey, a close colleague of McConnell’s at St. Lawrence Sugar and elsewhere.

²²MUA, MG1017, C49, James diary file, 11 May 1942.

²³Southam, a member of the newspaper-publishing family, and president of Southam Printing in Montreal, was a close friend of McConnell’s, while Molson seems to have shared the reserve of his family generally towards McConnell but was not openly hostile.

²⁴Paul F. Sise, BSc, born in 1879, a son of C.F. Sise, the founder of The Bell Telephone Company of Canada (1834–1918), and son-in-law of Charles E.L. Porteous. Educated at McGill, had been president of the Northern Electric Company since 1919, in succession to his brother, E.F. Sise. He was also president of Canadian Associated Aircraft Ltd., and a director of the Royal Bank of Canada, the Bell Telephone Company of Canada, the Montreal Trust Company, the Lake of the Woods Milling Company, the Dominion Engineering Company, the Industrial Acceptance Corporation, the Amalgamated Electric Corporation, Belding-Corticelli Ltd., the Sherwin-Williams Company of Canada Limited, Price Brothers Ltd., the Shawinigan Water and Power Co., and the Dominion Bridge Co.

²⁵MUA, MG1017, C49, James diary file, 14 May 1942.

²⁶George Wilbur Spinney, born in Yarmouth, Nova Scotia, in 1889, was now general manager of the Bank of Montreal and a friend of McConnell’s, as well as a governor. He succeeded H.R. Drummond as president of the Bank in 1942–8.

²⁷MUA, MG1017, C49, James diary file, 7, 17 and 22 June, 1943.

²⁸Selwyn Gwilym Blaylock, BSc, LLD, born in Paspebiac, Quebec, in 1879, was president and managing director of the Consolidated Mining and Smelting Company of Canada Limited in Trail, British Columbia, and a governor.

²⁹Ross Clarkson, born in Port Hope, Ontario, in 1888, was assistant general manager of the Royal Trust Company, where he had worked since 1908. In 1955 he was to become chairman. He was a director of the British American Bank Note Co. Ltd., the Sun Life Assurance Company, Montreal, London, and General Investors Ltd., Dominion Oilcloth and Linoleum Co. Ltd., Dominion Wire Rope Ltd., the Industrial Acceptance Corporation Ltd., the Consumers Glass Co. Ltd., the Lake of the Woods Milling Co. Ltd., the Dominion Textile Co. Ltd., the Great Lakes Paper Co. Ltd., and chairman of the Canadian advisory committee of the Northern Assurance Co. Ltd.

³⁰Hugh Arthur Crombie, BSc, born in Saginaw, Michigan in 1896, educated at McGill, vice-president of the Dominion Engineering Works Ltd., a director of the Dominion Textile Co. Ltd. and Montreal Cottons Ltd., governor of McGill, 1941–4.

³¹The Hon. Adrian Norton Knatchbull-Hugessen, KC, BCL, of MacDougall, MacFarlane, Scott and Hugessen. Born in Ashford, Kent in 1891, son of the first Baron Brabourne, educated at Eton and McGill, he stood unsuccessfully as a Liberal candidate in the general elections of 1935 against C.H. Cahan, and he was summoned to the Senate in 1937. He was son-in-law to George H. Duggan, chairman of the board of the Dominion Bridge Co. The Knatchbull-Hugessens in England reverted to their original name of Knatchbull. In Canada, they tended to call themselves Hugessen, as in the case of Associate Chief Justice (of the Court of Queen’s Bench of Quebec, and later Justice of the Federal Court of Canada) James K. Hugessen, son of the Senator and son-in-law of R.E. Stavert (son of Sir William Stavert of the Bank of Montreal), who in 1942 was vice-president of Consolidated Mining and Smelting under S.G. Blaylock. In England, Patricia Edwina Mountbatten, later Countess Mountbatten of Burma (daughter and heiress of the first Earl Mountbatten) in 1946 married John Ulick Knatchbull-Hugessen, later seventh Baron Brabourne. One of Hugessen’s daughters, Mary, married Stephen Keynes, the son of the biographer Sir Geoffrey Keynes, who was the brother of the economist Maynard (Lord) Keynes and married to a granddaughter of Charles Darwin.

³²MUA, MG1017, C75, James diary files, 9 July 1943.

³³At the foot of his letter, Birks named the non-graduates on the board in 1911–12 as Lord Strathcona, Sir William Macdonald, George Hague, R.B. Angus, Sir William Van Horne, James Ross, Sir E.S. Clouston, W.M. Birks, G.E. Drummond, J.W. Ross, C.B. Gordon and F. Howard Wilson.

He named the graduates as E.B. Greenshields, the Hon. J.S. Archibald, C.J. Fleet and Sir Thomas Roddick.

³⁴Library and Archives Canada, Henry Birks & Sons Family Papers, MG 30, A92, vol. 4, W.M. Birks to F. Cyril James, 13 July 1943.

³⁵Bronfman was finally elected to the Board in 1970 although he had been a benefactor to the University since 1940. Various governors have been identified as his opponents, especially McConnell and W.M. Stewart, and various reasons have been cited for their opposition to him, notably his activity during the era of Prohibition in the US. What this quotation illustrates, in any case, was that widespread opposition to him in the Board was taken for granted.

³⁶Library and Archives Canada, Henry Birks & Sons Family Papers, MG 30 A92, vol. 4, W.M. Birks to F. Cyril James, 15 July 1943.

³⁷See William Fong, *J.W. McConnell: Financier, Philanthropist, Patriot* (Montreal, Kingston, London, Ithaca: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2008), chapters 5 and 7.

³⁸MUA, MG 1017, C75, James diary files, 10 July 1957.

³⁹McConnell to Mr. and Mrs. Francis Wasserboehr, 15 December 1942, McConnell Papers.

⁴⁰Morris Watson Wilson (1883–1946), CMG, LLD, DCL, born in Lunenburg, Nova Scotia, had begun his career with the Royal Bank there in 1897 and since 1934 had been president and managing director of the Royal Bank of Canada. In 1940, Lord Beaverbrook had him appointed as representative of the British Ministry of Aircraft Production in the United States and Canada, and he developed a plan for the production Merlin aircraft engines, and of 3,000 aircraft a month, in the US. In January 1941, he became deputy chairman of the British Supply Council in North America, and he succeeded Arthur Purvis as chairman in August of the same year. Three years later, he became the Canadian representative on the pulp and paper committee of the Combined Materials and Resources Board, a Canadian-American committee charged with addressing shortages. He was interested in the arts and philosophy as well as in economics and banking.

⁴¹As he wrote in 1956 to a daughter of his teacher in Muskoka, Mrs. D.C. Thomas, "I have been Senior Governor on the McGill Board for more than six years; and for a much longer time, Chairman of the Nominating Committee. During that time I have nominated and secured three Chancellors, including the present Chancellor, Mr. B.C. Gardner, ex-President and Chairman of the Bank of Montreal." (McConnell Papers, 25 October 1956).