

Son of the Great Dominion: W. D. Lighthall and the Lighthall Family Papers

by Richard Virr

The W. D. Lighthall and the Lighthall family papers constitute a rich but largely unexplored source for Canadian literary, social and political history of the latter half of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century. The greater part of W. D. Lighthall's papers are held by the Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, McGill University Libraries, but the National Archives of Canada (Ottawa), and the McCord Museum of Canadian History (Montreal), have important holdings as well. The purpose of this paper is to make this material better known to researchers by exploring some of the major subjects documented in the Lighthall papers.

Les archives de W. D. Lighthall et de la famille Lighthall constituent un ensemble d'écrits très précieux et mal exploités sur l'histoire politique, sociale et littéraire du Canada à la fin du dix-neuvième siècle et au début du vingtième siècle. Les archives de W. D. Lighthall appartiennent pour la plupart au département des livres rares et des collections spéciales des bibliothèques de l'université McGill mais les archives nationales du Canada (Ottawa), de même que le musée McCord d'histoire canadienne (Montreal), en possèdent également un certain nombre. L'objet de cet article vise à mieux faire connaître ces documents aux chercheurs, en énumérant les principaux sujets qu'ils abordent.

Poet, novelist and anthologist; lawyer, politician and philanthropist; antiquarian, historian and collector; patriot, connoisseur and philosopher, William Douw Lighthall gave expression to all of these activities and traits during his long life. Although now largely forgotten, for almost a century Lighthall played an important role in the cultural and political life of Canada; there was little to which he did not turn his attention whether it was the preservation of the country's historical heritage, the fate and future of native peoples, the resolution of the Boer War, or the solar eclipse of 1936. Born in Hamilton, Ontario in 1857, Lighthall was, in fact, a life-long Montrealer and many of his activities and interests were motivated by and reflected this association. It was from these roots that his concern for the past and future of the Canadian nation sprang.

W. D. Lighthall was educated at the High School of Montreal and at McGill University (BA 1879, BCL 1881, MA 1885, LLD 1921). He began his legal career as the partner of A. C. de Léry

Macdonald, the collector of the papers of many of the seigneurial families including the Chartier de Lotbinière, Lemoyne, de Rigaud, Lefebvre de Bellefeuille and Harwood families to most of whom de Léry Macdonald was related.¹ Later Lighthall was the senior partner in his own law firms and was made a KC in 1906. His political activities were confined primarily to the municipal level; he was the mayor of Westmount from 1900-1903 and was one of the founders, in 1901, of the Union of Canadian Municipalities. He served on the Metropolitan Parks Commission for Greater Montreal. As well, he was a founder of the Great War Veterans Association, a forerunner of the Royal Canadian Legion.

In addition to his public activities, Lighthall pursued historical and literary interests. A founder of the Chateau Ramezay historical museum, he served as president of the Antiquarian and Numismatic Society and had an important role in the erection of the de Maisonneuve monument on Place d'Armes. He was deeply concerned for the history of

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Montreal and wrote *Montreal after 250 Years* (1892) and *Sights and Shrines of Montreal* (1907). The fate of the original Indian settlement, Hochelaga, was a pre-occupation reflected in many of his writings.

Lighthall was a founder of the short-lived Society of Canadian Literature, 1889-1890, and he published an important anthology of Canadian poetry, *Songs of the Great Dominion* (1889). This was republished in 1893 under the title *Canadian Songs and Poems*. He became a member of the Royal Society of Literature in 1895. In 1902 he was elected a fellow of the Royal Society of Canada and in 1917-1918 served as its president. He was one of the founders of the Canadian Authors' Association and was its president in 1930.

Lighthall developed a personal philosophy of virtue and universal goodwill. His views were embodied in his novels *The Young Seigneur* (1888), *The False Chevalier* (1898) and especially in *The Master of Life* (1908). However, his views were given a more systematic and developed expression in his treatises on ethics and politics including *Sketch of the New Utilitarianism* (1887); *Canada: A Modern Nation* (1904); *Superpersonalism, The Outer Consciousness: A Biological Entity* (1926) and *The Person of Evolution* (1930). His views found practical expression in his support of the Armenian Relief Committee in the 1920s and the Committee for Spanish Democracy in the 1930s.

In 1890 Lighthall married Cybel Wilkes, granddaughter of the Reverend Henry Wilkes (1805-1886), the well-known Congregationalist minister in Montreal. They had three children, Alice Margaret Schuyler (b. 1891), Cybel Katherine Schuyler (b. 1893) and William Wilkes Schuyler (b. 1896). Cybel Wilkes Lighthall was a founder of the Canadian Handicrafts Guild and her daughter Alice was to be equally active in this organization. Alice was a volunteer nurse in France during the First World War. She was also a long-time member of the Canadian Authors' Association. Her brother, William S., fought with the British Forces in Mesopotamia and was an early member of the Royal Flying Corps.

In August 1983, the Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, McGill University Libraries, received from Miss Alice Lighthall approximately five metres of the papers of her father, William Douw Lighthall, and six metres

of papers of other members of the Lighthall and related families. The Libraries already had approximately one metre of W. D. Lighthall's papers received at various times between ca. 1910 and 1946. This large body of material with some related holdings at the McCord Museum of Canadian History and at the National Archives of Canada constitutes a major primary source for the study of various aspects of Canadian life in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.²

The papers of W. D. Lighthall document most aspects of his multifarious activities as well as aspects of his private life. Among the latter, in addition to correspondence with family members, there are materials on his investments in Clark Gold Mines (1936-1942) and Montreal Aircraft Industries (1928-1942). However, it is with his more public activities that the bulk of Lighthall's papers deals and in the following survey only the most significant or unusual subjects can be mentioned.

Lighthall claims attention perhaps first as a Canadian literary figure. The publication of his *Songs of the Great Dominion* in 1889, the year following the appearance of his first novel, *The Young Seigneur*, marked his formal emergence on the Canadian literary scene. The anthology appeared in the English series "Canterbury Poets" under the general editorship of William Sharp (1855-1905), who is best remembered as the novelist whose pseudonym was Fiona Macleod, and much correspondence passed between Lighthall and Sharp. In the preparation of *Songs of the Great Dominion*, Lighthall corresponded with many of his poets and these letters will be found in the correspondence series of the papers. He also acquired copies of their works, many of which are annotated and, along with an annotated proof copy of *Songs of the Great Dominion*, are held in the Department of Rare Books and Special Collections. Among the poets for whom there is material are Charles Sangster, Archibald Lampman,³ William Wilfred Campbell, Pauline Johnson, Charles C. D. Roberts, John Reade, Bliss Carman and Susie Frances Harrison. It was at this time that Lighthall joined others in founding the Society of Canadian Literature, 1889-1890, and the correspondence file of the secretary for this period, the only records of the Society that appear to have survived, is included in the papers.

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**W.D. Lighthall, ca. 1900, Notman photograph. Lighthall Papers,
Department of Rare Books and Special Collections.**

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For Lighthall's novels, there exist corrected proofs for *The Young Seigneur* (1888); the manuscript drafts, typescripts and annotated copies as well as the original historical documents for *The False Chevalier* (1898); and the original manuscript of *The Master of Life* (1908). The original documents for *The False Chevalier* are from the eighteenth century and include a transcription of extracts from the diary of Michel Chartier de Lotbinière (1723-1798). They were discovered by Lighthall's law partner A.C. de Léry Macdonald. However, most of the manuscripts, typescripts and galley proofs for Lighthall's novels, as well as many of his other books, are among the Lighthall papers held at the National Archives of Canada.

In 1930, Lighthall was president of the Canadian Authors' Association. This organization was founded in 1921 by John Murray Gibbon, B. K. Sandwell and others to work for copyright protection for Canadian authors. His participation in the C.A.A. is documented by a series of letters and papers which cover the years 1921-1937. In particular, the convention in Toronto in 1931 and the overseas tour of 1933 are well covered. Many Canadian literary figures are represented in this correspondence and their letters are not necessarily limited to C.A.A. business. Among those for whom there is material are Charles G. D. Roberts, Duncan Campbell Scott, John Gavin, Watson Griffin, Goodridge Roberts, E. J. Pratt, Bliss Carman, Pelham Edgar, Lorne Pierce, William Deacon, J. C. Webster and Douglas Sladen. There are also a few letters about Pauline Johnson. In almost every case, additional correspondence from these individuals will be found in the general correspondence series.

Occupying an equally important place in Lighthall's life were his political and other public activities. As Mayor of Westmount, Quebec, he was, with Oliver Aiken Howland, Mayor of Toronto, founder in 1901 of the Union of Canadian Municipalities. The papers of this organization for the period 1901-1918 are preserved in the McCord Museum and in the Lighthall Papers in the Department of Rare Books and Special Collections. The latter also include the records of the International Municipal Congress, 1909. Additional records of the Union of Canadian Municipalities are among the Lighthall papers at the National Archives of

Canada. The private records of Lighthall's term as Mayor of Westmount (1900-1903) are also at the National Archives. His membership on the Metropolitan Parks Commission for Greater Montreal is documented by minutes, correspondence, drafts of legislation and clippings for the period 1898-1915 in the Lighthall Papers at McGill.

One of Lighthall's proudest achievements in the public sphere was the formation of the Great War Veterans Association. Like many Canadians, Lighthall took a passionate interest in the Great War in which two of his children served in various capacities. It would seem that he found inspiration for this association in the Grand Army of the Republic, the American organization which regrouped those who had fought in the Union Army during the American Civil War. The records of the Great War Veterans Association include letters, papers and clippings, 1915-1918, and notes on the collection of this material, 1942-1943.

The sufferings of the Armenian people during the First World War provoked great sympathy in Canada and Lighthall was involved in the Montreal Branch of the Armenian Relief Fund Association of Canada. The papers of this association include a minute book (1919-1920), correspondence (1919-1921), a scrapbook (1920), clippings and newsletters (1920-1926), a run of *Near East Relief* (1920-1922), and an almost complete run of the *Armenian Monthly* (1926-1927), published by the Armenian boys at the farm run by the Relief Fund in Georgetown, Ontario. In a similar vein, in the 1930s Lighthall joined others including E. A. Forsey and Carl Goldenberg in the Spanish Medical Aid Committee of Montreal, later the Montreal Committee in Support of Spanish Democracy. Among other activities, this group sponsored the visit of André Malraux to Montreal in 1937. The records of the Committee include correspondence, pamphlets and clippings, 1936-1939.

Lighthall had a life-long interest in philosophy. In 1887 he published *Sketch of the New Utilitarianism*. By the 1920s this interest became a paramount concern and he wrote a number of short booklets and longer discussions including *Superpersonalism*, *The Outer Consciousness: A Biological Entity* (1926) and *The Person of Evolution* (1930).⁴ These later

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works are documented in a series of papers that includes drafts, proofs and annotated copies of books. As well, there are clippings and correspondence for the period 1921-1944 with, among others, C. W. Hendel of McGill, Hans Driesch of Leipzig and F. C. Shiller of Oxford. Finally, there is the manuscript of Lighthall's last, and unpublished, work in this area *The Shrapnel Theory of the Universe*. Lighthall was active in various philosophical groups and there is a file of correspondence concerning the International Congress of Philosophy which met at Harvard in 1930 and another concerning the Montreal Group of the Canadian Philosophical Association, 1926-1932. The National Archives of Canada has the manuscripts, galley proofs and annotated copies for *Superpersonalism...* as well as some related material.

Lighthall was elected a fellow of the Royal Society of Canada in 1902 and served as president in 1917-1918. His presidential address was entitled "Canadian Poets of the Great War." The papers include a scrapbook of war poems collected by Lighthall. The Royal Society series includes correspondence concerning the election of members and the papers to be read at the meeting of the Society for the period 1910-1917. A second Royal Society series is in the Lighthall papers at the National Archives.

Throughout his life, Lighthall was an active collector of paintings and of art and ethnographic objects. The papers include notes on paintings and objects in his collection, notes and illustrations for lectures on monumental brasses (and a group of rubbings done in the 1880s) and on Flemish primitives. Also, there is a series of photographs of paintings in the Lighthall collection. A small body of correspondence with Sir William Van Horne in the years just before Van Horne's death concern the two collectors' recent acquisitions. Information about the dispersal of the collection will be found in papers of Alice Lighthall for the 1960s and early 1970s (the Cornelius Krieghoffs, however, were sold in the 1920s). Other information on Lighthall's collecting will be found in the David Ross McCord papers held at the McCord Museum.⁵ Part of Lighthall's collection of Polynesian masks is now at the Redpath Museum, McGill University.

Lighthall was closely associated with David Ross McCord (1844-1930), the founder of the

McCord Museum, and was the executor of his estate. Most of the material concerning the McCord estate will be found in the McCord papers at the McCord Museum, but some relevant material is among the Lighthall Papers. However, Lighthall's interest in Canadian history was not confined to McCord's activities and his museum. This interest was reflected in Lighthall's novels and also in a number of books, pamphlets and articles, some of which have already been mentioned. In addition to his interest in the history of Montreal, he had a special interest in the region around Beauharnois and Huntingdon, Quebec, and there are notes on this area and a number of nineteenth-century documents related to its history.

The physical remains of the past, and its commemoration, had a particular appeal for Lighthall, and he was active in the organization of the Historical Landmarks Association (1903-1908), the placing of historical markers on various buildings in Montreal and the erection of the de Maisonneuve monument. He was involved in the restoration of the Cuthbert Chapel in Berthier, Quebec (1923-1936), and was one of the trustees of Quebec House, the home of James Wolfe, in Westerham, Kent, which was given to Canada by the Montrealer J. B. Learmont. The management of Quebec House is documented by correspondence for the years 1922-1940. Lighthall had hoped to create a similar memorial by the purchase of Lord Amherst's house in England, called Montreal, but this plan did not come to fruition.

Lighthall had a special interest in the native peoples of the Americas and he spent much time investigating the fate of Hochelaga, the settlement on the site of Montreal visited by Jacques Cartier. The novel *The Master of Life* deals with this. Lighthall was made a chief of the Iroquois in 1909 with the name Ticonderoga. He was struck by the similarities between many aspects of Mayan and Chinese culture, and he worked closely with Dr. Kiang Kang-Hu of McGill University in developing his theories and claimed that he had solved the diffusion of culture controversy. His conclusions were embodied in his submission to the Royal Society in 1936, "Is the End of the Diffusion-of-Culture Controversy in Sight?"⁶ The series of papers dealing with this aspect of Lighthall's thought contains an extensive body of notes and

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documentation and some correspondence, 1932-1939.

Finally, it should not be forgotten that Lighthall was a practising lawyer for much of his life and there is a series that documents some of his activities in this area. Of particular interest are the files concerning the land claims of the Nishga, 1912-1930, and the status of the Six Nations, 1920-1921. Another group of files in this series concerns the "Old Masters Case" (1913-1914). This was an attempted insurance fraud in Montreal for paintings destroyed in a fire. The case is of interest in that it demonstrates the level of collecting expertise and connoisseurship in Montreal at this period.

Any survey of W. D. Lighthall and the Lighthall Family Papers would not be complete without some consideration of the papers of other members of the Lighthall and related families. Some forty individuals are represented and only the most important series of papers are mentioned here.

The Lighthall family, of Loyalist stock, came to Canada from New York state in the early part of the nineteenth century, ca. 1830. They were related to the Schuyler family who in turn were related to the Nyes who were among the claimants to the William Plenderleath Christie estates including the Seigneurie of Lacolle. Douw K. Lighthall, the first Canadian Lighthall, was registrar of Beauharnois, Quebec. His son William Francis (1827-1920), a notary, practised in Montreal except for a brief period in Hamilton, Ontario. William Francis married Margaret Wright, granddaughter of Major James Wright of McIntyre. Her father's brother-in-law was Peter Rutherford, builder of Fort Lennox. They had two sons, William Douw (1857-1954) and George Rutherford (1861-1956), also a notary, and a daughter, Katherine.

The papers of Cybel Wilkes Lighthall, the wife of W. D. Lighthall, include some correspondence, primarily from family members, and student work from her training as a kindergarten teacher in 1888-1890. Of particular interest are the cut and folded paper designs. There are also files on the Diggers and Weeders Garden Club, Westmount (1932-1953), the Canadian Handicrafts Guild of which she was a founder (1907-1952), and the Women's Art Society (1920-1924). During the First World War, she worked as a physical therapist and there is some

material on the military hospitals for 1918-1919.

The papers of Alice M. S. Lighthall, daughter of W. D. Lighthall, include correspondence (1906-1982), and some manuscripts of her poetry. There are important series documenting her activities on the Indian and Eskimo Committee of the Canadian Handicrafts Guild (1941-1976), and the Montreal Branch of the Canadian Authors' Association; these latter are concerned primarily with the Poetry Group (1943-1968). There is a small amount of material concerning the Girls' Committee of the Griffintown Club, Montreal (1931-1934). Alice served as a V.A.D. in France during the First World War and her war letters will be found in the papers of her parents, of her aunt Katherine and of her grandfather, W. F. Lighthall. Her brother, William S., served with the British forces in France, Mesopotamia, Egypt, Salonica and Palestine during the First World War and was an early member of the Royal Flying Corps. He was promoted to captain by the end of the war and won the D.F.C. Later, he was associated with his uncle George R. Lighthall in trying to develop aviation in Canada. His war letters will be found in the papers of his family and there are some transcripts, but most of William S. Lighthall's papers are held by the Canadian War Museum in Ottawa.

George R. Lighthall, the brother of W. D. Lighthall, married Anne Dean, sister of Mrs. Charles Lyman of the Montreal pharmaceutical family. A founder of the Canadian branch of the Aerial League of the British Empire, his papers contain some information on the beginnings of aviation in Canada. A notary, he drafted the profession of faith of the apostate priest Charles Chiniquy in 1899. Some letters from Chiniquy will be found in the papers of W. F. and Margaret Lighthall, parents of W. D. Lighthall and in those of his sister, Katherine. The daughter of George R., Anne Dean Lighthall, spent most of her life as a nurse in France and Belgium after her conversion to Roman Catholicism in 1914. She was active in the Resistance during the German occupation of France during the Second World War. Her papers include correspondence and two unpublished manuscripts, *Histoire de ma conversion* (ca. 1935) and *Oublier? - Jamais! La Guerre telle que je l'ai vue en France* (1946). The latter also exists in her English version.

Christine Lighthall Henderson (1868-1968), the Montreal poet and a cousin of W. D. Lighthall, is represented by some correspondence and papers primarily for the years 1950-1968, and by some drafts and versions of her poetry. The papers of the Montreal Congregationalist minister, Dr. Henry Wilkes, the grandfather of Cybel Wilkes Lighthall, includes some correspondence (1832-1894), and some of his sermons. The sermon book (1863-1864), kept by Maggie Wales includes sermons by Wilkes and other Montreal preachers including Cornish and Duclos. The Peter Rutherford papers include two files of correspondence (1817-1876), and a ledger (1851-1853). There are also small bodies of papers for various members of the Nye, Hoyle and Schuyler families in the nineteenth century and some legal papers of Edward Ellice.

In addition to the papers that have been mentioned, the collection includes numerous photographs and these constitute a rich source of visual documentation. There are many Lighthall family portraits, and snapshots and portraits of people associated with them and of events in which they participated. For example, there is a photograph of the 1930 Royal Society of Canada dinner at McGill University, and one of the London, England, dinner of the 1933 Canadian Authors' Association; there are portraits of the Birks family of Montreal, of the poet Mary Morgan, and of Lady Roddick; and there is a group of fifty-two snapshots taken in 1918 by Cybel Wilkes Lighthall of convalescent soldiers at Ste. Anne's Military Hospital and at the Lighthall homes in Westmount and at Lac Tremblant.

This survey of the W. D. Lighthall and the Lighthall Family Papers has of necessity touched on only some of the most significant or interesting subjects documented in them. What should emerge from this presentation is that the papers are particularly rich in correspondence on a great variety of subjects and with a wide variety of correspondents. This, given the prominent role of the Lighthalls in so many spheres of activity, makes these papers an important, and as yet largely unexplored, source for Canadian studies.

Notes

1. The de Léry Macdonald collection of seigneurial family papers was acquired by McGill University in 1922 through the offices of W. D. Lighthall. The collection is housed in the Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, McGill University Libraries and has the designation MS 439.
2. The W. D. Lighthall and Lighthall Family Papers are held in the Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, McGill University Libraries, as MS 216. There is a partly-annotated finding-aid with file level descriptions. The McCord Museum of Canadian History holds records of the Union of Canadian Municipalities, 1901-1918, and the McCord Family Papers (M21411). For the latter see: McCord Museum, *McCord Family Papers, 1766-1945* (Montreal: 1986), 2 vols. Lighthall material will be found in volume one, entries 3100-4009. Lighthall was a member of the Library Committee, McGill University, for many years and there is extensive correspondence with the University Librarian, Gerhard R. Lomer, for the period ca. 1920 - ca. 1935 in the library records; see R.G. 40, McGill University Archives.
3. The Lampman-Lighthall correspondence will be published in the not too distant future by Michael Gnarowski in *Canadian Poetry: Studies, Documents and Reviews*.
4. For a discussion of Lighthall's philosophy see, "The Self-Transcendence of Reason, and Evolutionary Mysticism: Richard M. Bucke and William D. Lighthall," in Leslie Armour and Elizabeth Trott, *The Faces of Reason: An Essay on Philosophy and Culture in English Canada 1850-1950* (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1981).
5. McCord Museum, *McCord Family Papers*. I: 4000-4009.
6. William Douw Lighthall. "Is the End of the Diffusion-of-Culture Controversy in Sight," *Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada*, 3rd ser. 30 (sec. 2) (1936): 49-55.

