

OSLER LIBRARY NEWSLETTER

McGILL UNIVERSITY, MONTREAL, CANADA

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THE TRANSLATION OF THE OSLER LIBRARY FROM THE STRATHCONA BUILDING TO THE McINTYRE BUILDING



Both the decision to move the Osler Library to the McIntyre Building and the plans for its accommodation there were strongly influenced by the support which the Library was to receive from the Wellcome Trust. This story of the translation of the Osler Library from the Strathcona Building to the McIntyre Building

must therefore begin with some account of the negotiations which led to the Wellcome Trust grant.

Sir William Osler's magnificent bequest to McGill, his superb library, has been sustained by the funds he and Lady Osler provided, with later supplements from other donors. In the sixth decade of the twentieth century, however, a generation having passed since Osler's death, it had become increasingly difficult, in fact impossible, to add to the Library's holding more than a selection of the annual output of new books in the history of medicine; rare books, even those required to fill the more obvious gaps, were beyond reach. Early in 1956, therefore, a number of inquiries were sent out in the hope of finding greater financial aid. On 18 July 1956, Dr. Wilder Penfield wrote to Sir Henry Dale in London, asking his advice about several foundations. This letter had special reference to The Wellcome Trust, of which Sir Henry was then Chairman, but there were two initial difficulties. The greater of these appeared to be the dollar problem. Special permission would be needed from Exchange Control to provide dollars for the needs of McGill, and such permission was not, at the time, easy to get. The second problem was a comparatively simple one - the use of Sir Henry Wellcome's name.

Both problems were solved happily. The suggestion that the larger part of any grant should be used for book purchases in Britain was modified (4 September) by the late Dr. F. Cyril James, McGill's Principal, to refer to the sterling area. Not long afterwards Dr. James persuaded the McGill Governors that the name "Wellcome Camera" should be given to a large reading room connected with the Osler Library in the projected new building for the Faculty of Medicine. On 7 September 1956, then, a one-page proposal was submitted to Sir Henry Dale, offering that the University would undertake to build and furnish the Camera if the Trust saw fit to provide continuing funds for book purchases in the sterling area.

As Dean of the McGill Medical Faculty from 1956 to 1963, Dr. Lloyd G. Stevenson was involved in all aspects of the planning of the McIntyre Medical Sciences Building and, at the same time, as Professor of the History of Medicine at McGill University, his special concern was the Osler Library. In the article presented here, Dr. Stevenson tells the story of the Osler Library's translation from its old home in the Strathcona Medical Building to the new McIntyre Medical Sciences Building, with the negotiations which led to the Wellcome Trust grant and to the addition of the Wellcome Camera.

January 1957 saw the first two meetings of the "Medical Undergraduate Teaching Project Committee," which marked the initiation of planning for the McIntyre Medical Sciences Building. The Principal and the Vice-Principal were present, together with representatives of both clinical and preclinical departments, although chiefly the preclinical. The long-term development of McIntyre Park, the projected site, was considered at some length.

At this point there was no firm plan for moving the Osler Library. It was recognized, of course, that it would be deplorable to separate the Osler from the Medical Library, but the demands for space were innumerable and the needs were very real. There was, besides, some difference of opinion about what was wanted for the Osler Library. Should the handsome old room designed by Percy Nobbs and opened in 1929 be abandoned in favor of a completely new library? Obviously new needs had developed and much new space would be required; and it was equally obvious that the commitment made earlier to the Wellcome Trust had envisaged the Osler Library in the new building, the Wellcome Camera forming an adjunct to it. A strong feeling had grown up, furthermore, that really distinguished interiors being very rare in academic as in other kinds of architecture, it would be a pity to desert, and in effect to destroy, the masterwork of Percy Nobbs. There was, however, another view put forward to the effect that the designers of a large new building should not be handicapped at the very beginning by being required to incorporate in their designs a considerable element of an older pattern.

At first it seemed that this objection would prove to be a substantial one. Mr. Lorne E. Marshall and his colleagues at Messrs. Barott, Marshall, Merrett and Barott were preparing plans for a fourteen-story round building (or at any rate for one with twenty facets) and it looked as if a large rectangular

room would be a difficult inclusion. Once again two kinds of difficulties were solved at the same time by the plan which was adopted. The large rectangle was to be enclosed in the portion of the new structure which was to transcend and to project beyond the limits of the circle; it was designed, nevertheless, to be contiguous with the McGill Medical Library occupying the same level of the round building. A segment of the old was consequently built into the new; the Osler Library room of the Strathcona Building was translated into the Osler Library of the McIntyre Building — oak panelling, bookcases, doors and windows. This was achieved through a special grant for the purpose from the John and Mary R. Markle Foundation of New York, made at a time when John M. Russell, a most perceptive and imaginative administrator was President of the Foundation. McGill supplied the second rectangular room (actually each end of it has an inward curve, both of these areas pierced with heraldic windows) which was to become the Wellcome Camera, a part of the Osler Library, with the original Osler Library (now renamed the Osler Room); opening from it and with the seminar room (subsequently named the W.W. Francis Room) and a number of offices, in addition to stack space, nearby. The architect chiefly responsible for the very fine Wellcome Camera and the new rooms adjacent was Neil J. Elliott.

Thus all the requirements were met, splendid new facilities, from both functional and aesthetic viewpoints, combining with the preservation of tradition. Osler's ashes, Osler's books, and the radiant spirit of William Osler were given an impressive and serviceable home, the trustees of Sir Henry Wellcome providing the means for the Library's further growth.

In a letter sent to Montreal 27 February 1957, Sir Henry Dale first suggested the use in the Wellcome Camera of a copy of the fine bronze portrait plaque of Sir Henry Wellcome made by Mrs. Mary Gillick for the Royal Society of Medicine in London, a suggestion which was adopted with enthusiasm. About a month later, on 26 March, Sir Henry wrote again:

"I... met Dr. James in London, having arranged to lunch with him at the Athenaeum Club, which is quite a short way from the Waterloo Place branch of the Bank of Montreal, where we expected to have to go to complete the business of authorization for the opening of the McGill University's account there, and the payment into that account of the capital grant and successive annual grants by The Wellcome Trust. We found, however, that all had been arranged suc-

cessfully with the Exchange Control Department of the Bank of England by the Secretary of The Wellcome Trust before we met, so that we had nothing to do but congratulate one another on the early coming into effect of the arrangement which had been proposed."

On 29 April 1957, Dr. W.W. Francis wrote to Sir Henry Dale on behalf of the Board of Curators of the Osler Library, expressing their thanks to The Wellcome Trust for a munificent initial grant and for the assurance of an annual grant for twenty-five years for the purchase of books in the sterling area. "I am sure the scheme would also have Osler's posthumous approval, for I remember his relief on learning that Mr. Wellcome was the public-spirited purchaser of Payne's library for which he (Osler) had unsuccessfully tried to bid on behalf of the Johns Hopkins Medical School." At a later time, and at the instance of Dr. Donald Bates, the original "scheme", as Dr. Francis called it, was changed into a permanent endowment for the same purpose.

1963 saw the completion of the major part of the plans for the translation of the Osler Library from the Strathcona Building to the McIntyre Building. The physical move, with its many attendant difficulties, was of course yet to come and the new building was not fully occupied until the autumn of 1965, with the official opening taking place in March 1966.

Lloyd G. Stevenson
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versity.

Editorial Committee for the Newsletter: E.H. Bensley, Editor;
Susan Biggs, Associate Editor; Karl Holeczek, Photography.

ROBERT HARRIS PORTRAIT OF OSLER ON EXHIBIT

During the past summer the Confederation Art Gallery in Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island, has had on display a collection of portraits by Robert Harris, an eminent Canadian artist best known for his painting *The Fathers of Confederation* depicting the members of the Quebec Conference of 1864 in session. The exhibition was assembled and catalogued by Moncrieff Williamson, Director of the Confederation Art Gallery and Museum, with the assistance of his staff and the enthusiastic cooperation of individuals and institutions across Canada and elsewhere.* Although Robert Harris was born in North Wales, he came to Prince Edward Island when only seven years of age and, while he later took up residence in other places, including Montreal, he regarded the Island as his home. It was therefore most appropriate that this Harris exhibition should have been planned as a part of the celebration in 1973 of the hundredth anniversary of the Island's entry into Confederation. Happily the exhibition is not to be confined to Prince Edward Island. At the end of the summer it moved in its entirety to the National Gallery in Ottawa.

A prolific painter of portraits, Robert Harris included a number of physicians amongst his subjects. One of them was William Osler. Harris' portrait of Osler, on loan to the exhibition from McGill University, has for many years hung in McGill's Strathcona Medical Building (recently renamed the Strathcona Anatomy and Dentistry Building). In late December 1903 Osler had come to Montreal from Baltimore to address a meeting of the Montreal Medico-Chirurgical Society. Advantage was taken of this to arrange for him to visit Harris' Montreal studio and sit for his portrait. The commissioning of this portrait is described in the following excerpt from an editorial in the February 1904 issue of the *Montreal Medical Journal*. "The association of Dr. Osler with McGill University did not end when he went to Philadelphia and later to Baltimore. He has always maintained a bond with his old friends and his old school, and that connection is now being marked in a friendly way. A small committee is undertaking to receive subscriptions, limited to five dollars each, for a testimonial fund, to which only graduates in medicine will be permitted to subscribe. The intention is to procure a portrait of Dr. Osler for the Faculty room, and a replica to adorn his own walls, with a photogravure reproduction for each full subscriber. Within a few hours of issuing the circular there was sufficient response to insure the success of the plan, which is a testimonial in itself, ..."

In due course the portrait was placed in the Faculty room of the McGill Medical Building. It remained there until April 1907 when a disastrous fire destroyed the greater part of this building and the portrait was lost. Following the completion of new quarters for the Faculty in the form of the Strathcona Medical Building, the replica "to adorn his own walls" was presented to McGill University by Lady Osler. It is this replica which has been on exhibit amongst Harris' other works.

E.H. Bensley

*Moncrieff Williamson, *Robert Harris (1849-1919)*, Ottawa, The National Gallery of Canada, 1973.

TO THE "FRIENDS OF THE OSLER LIBRARY"

Since the founding of the "Friends of the Osler Library" a little over a year ago, the response to the appeal for supporters has been gratifying, for well over a hundred people have enlisted. One might wonder why we have been so slow in joining a movement which started sixty years ago with the formation of "La Société des Amis de la Bibliothèque Nationale et des Grandes Bibliothèques de France" and has spread rapidly, particularly in the United States, where literally hundreds of groups of "Friends" have been formed to provide valuable support to libraries of all sorts. Whatever the cause of our slowness, the reason for starting now is clear enough; the move to establish the "Friends of the Osler Library" is one element in a program of heightened activity of the Library that commenced several years ago and has resulted in a marked increase in the service offered by the Library, not only to McGill scholars but to others near and far. The revision of the catalogue; the publication of a new *Bibliotheca Osleriana*; the rearrangement of the collections to make them more usable; the active encouragement of graduate and undergraduate students to use the Library; and the publication of a newsletter have had a remarkable effect which has whetted the appetite of those immediately concerned with the management of the Library and has encouraged them to progress further.

As the scope of the Library's services increases, so does the need for support, moral as much as financial. The immediate objective of the "Friends", being to ensure the funding of the *Osler Library Newsletter*, is modest enough. Once this is secured, we could move on to other objectives such as the publication of a "Guide to the Osler Library", then to a much more ambitious project, the provision of a proper rare book wing in the Library, the need for which becomes increasingly apparent as each year passes.

For the present, may it suffice for me to greet all who are already "Friends" and to ask those others who may see this message, and who have an interest in the Osler Library, seriously to consider joining in the support of one of the outstanding libraries of its type in the world which, well sustained and enlarged over the years, is seeking further to extend its usefulness.

H. Rocke Robertson,
President, Friends of the Osler Library

With this issue of the *Newsletter* an appeal for funds for the 1973-74 academic year is launched by the Friends of the Osler Library. The costs of clerical work make it impossible for us to appeal to each Friend individually. Friends who wish to contribute to this appeal are asked to fill in the enclosed form and to return it with their cheques to the designated address.

Below is a list of those who contributed to the Friends during the past academic year.

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