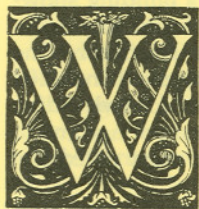


OSLER LIBRARY NEWSLETTER

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Notes Towards a Biography of Dr. William Henry Drummond



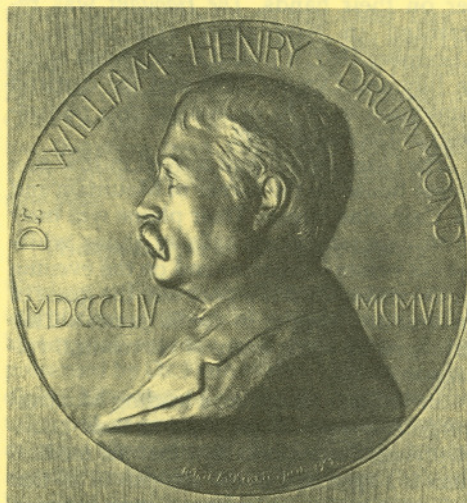
Who merits a biography? Not an easy question to answer. It will be readily agreed, however, that few persons' achievements or personalities can hold a reader's interest for two or three hundred pages not to speak of the multi-volume 'Lives' that are now popular. Then there is the matter of biographical 'material', those essential primary and secondary sources which make biography possible. Equally vital, the writer prepared to spend the countless hours required by the project and the enterprising publisher willing to commission it.

The significance of Dr. William Henry Drummond's poetry is arguable. Dialect verse has fallen out of favour but Margaret Atwood,¹ editor of *The New Oxford Book of Canadian Verse*, believes that he "deserves re-evaluation" and it is well to remember that within a decade of its first appearance 65,000 copies of *The Habitant and Other French-Canadian Poems* were published, no mean achievement.

His widow's biographical sketch² published in *The Great Fight* (1908) provided the outline of her husband's career on which others who have written about him have relied.³ Much additional material contained in a tin trunk measuring 30 1/2" x 16" x 12" was loaned to the Osler Library on 26 April 1948 by Moira Drummond Craig, wife of Surgeon-Commander D. D. Craig, RN. The latter donated the papers permanently on 8 May 1968. A brief inventory had meanwhile been made by Dr. W. W. Francis and a complete listing was completed by Marilyn Fransiszyn. But the papers have been slow to attract the attention of would-be biographers. D. J. O'Donoghue's *The Poets of Ireland*⁴ introduced me to Drummond many years ago and I included the poet of the *habitant* and *voyageur* in my *Brief Lives of Irish Doctors*⁵ (1978). A short visit to the Osler Library in the fall of 1987 enabled me to spend a few days "skimming" through the contents of the "tin trunk", now re-arranged in eleven boxes and sundry folios. My determination to look at these papers - the building bricks with which a biography might be assembled - on a more leisurely occasion was facilitated by my election as Osler Library Fellow for 1988.

I spent May 1988 in Montreal. The arduous journey from my home in Ireland which the Drummond family endured over several weeks in 1864 was completed by air in some hours. Their quarters in one of the poorer streets of a city just beginning to grow would have compared unfavourably with my comfortable apartment hotel on Boulevard de Maisonneuve in a vibrant city which has certainly lost whatever innocence it may once have possessed.

Summer's arrival was late in 1988 but Montreal's bare trees gradually gained green mantles while cloudy skies made it more tolerable to sit at a desk hour after hour (Monday to Friday 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.) albeit the desk was Sir William Osler's desk and the gracious background the Osler Library. Not, indeed, that 5 p.m. saw the end of my browsing for additional information was available in the nearby McLennan Library.



William Henry Drummond: a portrait medallion by R. Tait McKenzie, now in Montreal General Hospital.

When George Drummond died within eighteen months of his arrival in Montreal he left a widow determined to rear her four sons without her relatives' grudging support. William, the eldest son, saw the need to assist his mother and in his early teens he became a telegrapher at a lumber camp in the forest north of Montreal where, at l'Abord-à-Plouffe he met *habitant* farmers who spoke French but must have reminded him of the smallholders he had known in Ireland.

The leading article in this issue is by J.B. Lyons who was an Osler Library Fellow in May 1988. A brief note on Dr. Lyons appeared on page 2 of the June 1988 *Osler Library Newsletter* under the title "Osler Library Fellows for 1988." He spent the greater part of his month here examining the Drummond papers which, as he describes, came to the Osler Library in 1948 in a tin trunk. They have not previously been used in a "full-scale" biography of William Henry Drummond which Dr. Lyons hopes to undertake.

Bord à Plouffe, Bord à Plouffe,
W'at do I hear w'en I dream of you?
Too many t'ing for sleepin' well!
De song of de ole tam cariole bell,
De voice of dat girl from Sainte Angèle
(I geev her a ring was mark "fidèle")
Dat's w'at I hear.

He also encountered raftsmen who ran the rapids in dare-devil fashion, colourful men with rings in their ears, fond of songs such as "En Roulant Ma Boule", "Dans le Prison de Nantes" and "Par Derrière Chez ma Tante". These men of French, Scottish and Irish origin, the fabled *voyageurs* of the Canadian wilds, fascinated him. Some of them had gone with Wolseley to the Red River in 1870 to quell the Riel insurrection and later were with him on the Nile expedition of 1885. He spent his leisure hours recording their stories in verses scribbled on the backs of telegraph forms.

As soon as Drummond's brothers could contribute to the family budget he returned to Montreal High School as a mature student and thence in 1877 to the medical school at McGill where his teachers included Robert Palmer Howard and the young William Osler. When Drummond flunked at McGill he enrolled at the rival school, Bishop's Medical College, and graduated in 1884.⁷ After a period in the Eastern Townships, Dr. Drummond settled in Montreal where he built up a large practice and held a chair in medical jurisprudence at Bishop's Medical College.

A powerfully-built, genial and extroverted man with a genius for friendship, Drummond was an "out-door type", devoted to fishing and shooting. After the day's sport he was a source of fun around the camp fire with endless recitations of his

own poems composed in the *patois* of the *habitant* farmers. Back in Montreal he spent his evenings with male friends, tipping a little no doubt and devoted to the ingestion of oysters. He seemed an instinctive bachelor until he met May Isobel Harvey, a doctor's daughter from Jamaica, when it was love at first sight. They married in 1894 and lived at 349 Mountain Street, a house which lacked a bathroom and was reputed to be haunted by the ghost of Jefferson Davis.

May Drummond had literary ambitions and was amazed that her husband should treat his own gift so lightly. She set about collecting his verses but could find only five, "The Wreck of the 'Julie Plante' - A Legend of Lac St. Pierre", "M'sieu Smit", "Memories", "Mon Choual 'Castor'" and "De Papineau Gun". As he wrote others (1895 and 1896 were productive years) she copied them into a notebook "too big for any man's pocket" and waited until she had enough to fill a book. Then with the assistance of her brother-in-law, Tom Drummond, she arranged for their publication by Putnams of New York. Their success increased the demand for Drummond as an after-dinner speaker, reciter and reader and led to a conflict between medicine and literature which was resolved in favour of the latter.

The Habitant and Other French-Canadian Poems with an introduction by Louis Fréchette⁸ and illustrated by Frederick Simpson Coburn⁹ came out in November 1897, a substantial octavo volume handsomely bound in green cloth with gold lettering. It contained twenty-three poems, the five already mentioned and others such as "Le Vieux Temps" and "Ole Tam on Bord à Plouffe".

Drummond's verses introduced a variety of appealing types:

- the contented *habitant* farmer:

An' some cole winter night how I wish you can see us,

W'en I smoke on de pipe, an' de ole woman sew

By de stove of T'ree Reeve - ma wife's fader geev her

On day we get marry, dat's long tam ago¹⁰

- the nubile village beauty, "De Nice Leetle Canadienne":

O she 's quick an' she 's smart, an' got plaintee heart,

If you know correc' way go about,

An' if you don't know, she soon tole you so

Den tak' de firs' chance an' get out;
But if she love you, I spik it for true,
She will mak' it more beautiful den,
An' sun on de sky can't shine lak de eye
Of dat nice leetle Canadienne¹¹

- the proverbially wise country doctor, "Ole Docteur Fiset":

Let her rain or snow, all he want to know
Is jus' if anywan 's feelin' sick,
For Docteur Fiset 's de ole fashion kin'
Doin' good was de only t'ing on hees min'
So he got no use for de politique.

An' he's careful too, 'cos firs' t'ing he do
For fear dere was danger some fever case,
Is tak' w'en he 's come leetle w'isky chaud,

Den 'noder wan too jus' before he go,
He's so scare carry fever aroun' de place!¹²

The ballads included "Phil-o-rum Juneau" based on a legend of "La Chasse Gallerie" current in French-speaking Canada, which held that on New Year's Day the *voyageurs* and *coureurs de bois* who had perished in the wilderness came back in mid-air through snowstorm and hurricane to kiss the girls and visit their folk, and "Maxime La Belle", a *voyageur's* description of the Nile expedition and of Queen Victoria's request for recruits:

An' so she 's write Joseph Mercier, he 's stop on Trois Rivières -

"Please come right off, an' bring wit' you t'ree honder voyageurs.

"I got de plaintee sojer, me, beeg feller six foot tall -

Dat 's Englishman, an Scotch also, don't wear no pant at all;

Of course, de Irishman 's de bes', raise all de row he can,

But noboddy can pull batteau lak good Canadian man."¹³

The book was successful. The first edition sold out within days. Putnams had a bestseller on their hands. *The Habitant* was reprinted in November and twice in December 1897; it would be reprinted again in July and October 1898 and the demand continued so as to necessitate two reprints in December 1898.

The Drummonds had moved in 1897 to a larger house on the corner of Mountain and St. Catherine Streets. Their phone was busy with congratulatory calls in those white weeks before Christmas and on the evening of December 23rd the poet was the guest of honour at a supper in the St. James's Club arranged by some thirty of his medical colleagues.

Sir William Hingston, a leading Montreal surgeon, proposed the toast to their guest. Replying, Drummond said that the medical man is a specialist in the analysis of all that is human and if he, in his painting of types, in his delineation of human weaknesses, passions and foibles had gained his colleagues' applause he felt satisfied that his work had been well done.

His engagements took him across Canada in the summer of 1901 and on September 1st he wrote to his wife from the Hotel Vancouver: "I came, I saw, and was conquered." Accustomed to eastern landscapes, he was fascinated by the wheat-lands of Manitoba and astounded by British Columbia's incomparable mountains. From the train he had also seen "thousands of cattle dotting the vast plain; here and there a wandering band of Indians (wild ones), and Thursday evening at sunset a regular Western picture of the Remington type."¹⁴

Johnnie Courteau and Other Poems (1901) and *The Voyageur and Other Poems* (1905) in-

creased Drummond's literary celebrity but when his brothers added mining to their other successful business ventures he undertook the medical care of the miners at Kerr Lake, Cobalt, Ontario, and travelled frequently between Montreal and the mining camp. An outbreak of smallpox had kept him there over Easter 1907 when he was stricken by a cerebral haemorrhage from which he died without regaining consciousness on 6 April 1907. He was survived by his widow and two children, Barclay¹⁵ and Moira.

His remains arrived in Montreal at 9:30 a.m. on April 8th and were taken to St. George's Church through a blinding snowstorm. The interment in Mount Royal Cemetery took place in the afternoon. The messages of condolence received included that of Pauline Johnson, the Mohawk Indian poet: "He has crossed the last portage and to Canada's great loss of her most gifted son we add our own."

Family responsibilities, medical practice, the lakes and rivers of the Canadian wilderness, the triumphs of literary consumption - these, with the "laughter and the love of friends" so prized by Hilaire Belloc - were the ingredients of William Henry Drummond's life.

Can colour and narrative drive be added to my outline of his career? I believe they can. Does the material in the tin trunk provide justification for a full-scale biography? I believe it does.

Like many of his generation, Drummond was a tireless correspondent. The Drummond papers hold many of his letters to his wife and a few of hers in their courtship days. His literary associates included Louis Fréchette, Archibald Lampman, Thomas O'Hagan, Duncan Campbell Scott and others. Lampman, who suffered from rheumatic heart disease, wrote to Drummond on 30 December 1898: "I still move about like an octogenarian - am neither better nor worse. One may be thankful I suppose for not being the latter." "Poor Lampman died Thursday last!" Drummond informed his wife in February 1899. "Two days illness -"

A presentation copy of *The Voyageur* was acknowledged by the President of the United States writing from Oyster Bay, New York, on 5 September 1905:

My dear Dr. Drummond:

It was most kind of you to send me the volume of poems and I shall read them with pleasure, I am sure. I shall always remember the all too brief visit you paid us when I was governor.

With many thanks,

Sincerely yours,
Theodore Roosevelt.¹⁶

The director of a New York lecture bureau became one of Drummond's warmest admirers. His friendly letters gave the doctor details of his agonizing "rheumatism" - actually a classic account of *tabes dorsalis*, an inexorable nervous disorder. "An ulcer has developed on the ball of my right foot and my doctor has been trying to find out if gan-

grene has started. I don't think so. Oh the pain. The awful pain. The centre of it is my right heel."¹⁷

W. H. Parker, the general manager (or "Commodore") of the Laurentian Club at Lac la Pêche, was one of Drummond's closest friends. They corresponded over many years and on 28 March 1907 Drummond wrote to him from the mining camp: "We are quarantined here owing to one or two cases of small pox which have developed in the locality..."¹⁸

On March 31st, the day before he was taken ill, Drummond wrote to his old Knowlton friend, Judge S. W. Foster:

From far off wild Temagami
Land of the silver gnome
My warmest greetings go to thee
Among the hills of Brome.¹⁹

The lilacs were in bloom when Mr. Donald K. Roy, Manager of the Mount Royal Cemetery Company, directed me to the Drummond family plot, a green area dominated by an impressive Celtic Cross sacred to the memory of George Drummond, died 13 November 1865, aged 53 years, and Elizabeth Morris Soden, his wife, died 17 May 1906, aged 83 years.

"The shadows pass - I see the light / O Morning Light how clear and strong" - the lines are by William Henry Drummond who before a year had passed was laid to the right of his mother. His brothers joined them in due course with that inevitability from which there is no redress: John James Drummond (1856-1917); George Edward Drummond (1858-1919); Thomas Joseph Drummond (1860-1916).

I had already visited Mohill, the small cruciform town in County Leitrim where William Henry Drummond was born on 13 April 1854, and Tawley the townland overlooking Donegal Bay where his early years were spent close to the barracks of the Royal Irish Constabulary to which his father was posted. Springs of life, vital and pure, in the West of Ireland; a last resting place in Canada high on Mount Royal; and meanwhile, after the desolation of emigration, a fulfillment in medicine and the arts traceable in the tin trunk's assorted papers. William Henry Drummond's biography will be worth undertaking if a publisher's interest can be recruited.

Notes

- 1 Margaret Atwood, Introduction to *The New Oxford Book of Canadian Verse* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1983): xxxiv.
- 2 May Isobel Drummond in *The Great Fight* by William Henry Drummond. (New York: Putnam's, 1908): 3-48. Mrs Drummond died on 12 December 1939.
- 3 R. H. Craig, *Dalhousie Review*, 5, 161-169, 1925; W. J. McNally, *CMAJ*, 47, 280-283, 1942; W. E. Swinton, *Ibid*, 114, 265-266, 1976.
- 4 D. J. O'Donoghue, *The Poets of Ireland*. (Dublin: Figgis, n.d.; reprinted New York: Johnson, 1970): 123.
- 5 J. B. Lyons, *Brief Lives of Irish Doctors*. (Du-

blin: Blackwater Press, 1978): 124-125.

- 6 *The Poetical Works of William Henry Drummond*. (New York: Putnam's, 1912): 229.
- 7 E. H. Bensley, Bishop's Medical College. *CMAJ*, 72, 463-465, 1955.
8. Louis Fréchette (1839-1908) was the unofficial poet laureate of French Canada.
- 9 F. S. Coburn (1871-1960) studied art in New York and Europe becoming RCA in 1927; his paintings hang in the National Gallery of Canada.
- 10 William Henry Drummond, *The Habitant and Other French-Canadian Poems*. (New York: Putnam's, 1897): 4.
- 11 *Ibid*, 32.
- 12 *Ibid*, 119.
- 13 *Ibid*, 42.
- 14 Frederic Remington (1861-1909), a master in the depiction of horses in motion and western scenes visited the Drummonds in Montreal in 1899.
- 15 Charles Barclay Drummond died on 29 July 1933.
- 16 Drummond Papers, Osler Library.
- 17 *Ibid*.
- 18 *Ibid*.
- 19 *Ibid*.

J. B. Lyons

Professor of the History of Medicine,
Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland

Osler Day

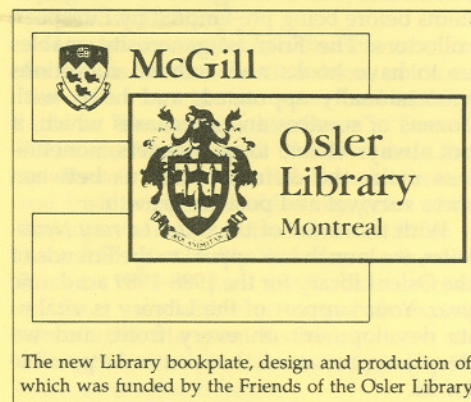
The *Osler Library Newsletter* for June 1988 contained an announcement that Osler Day - 1988 will be held on November 2nd with Dr. Lewis Thomas as Osler Lecturer. Dr. Thomas has been obliged to cancel his engagement as Osler Lecturer on November 2nd. Osler Day has therefore been postponed until April 1989; further details will be available in the new year.

Fridays at Four in the Osler Library

"Fridays at Four in the Osler Library" is the title of a new series of informal talks about the history of science and medicine to be presented by Dr. Faith Wallis, History of Medicine Librarian. As the title suggests, the talks will be given at 4 p.m. on Friday afternoons, a time when medical students, teaching staff and the community at large, drained by a hard week's work, may appreciate some mental refreshment and a change of intellectual pace. The talks are designed to focus on scientific and medical writers whose works are richly represented in the Osler Library's collections, and to give participants an opportunity to examine these historic books at first hand. Everyone is welcome to attend. The dates and titles of this year's presentations are as follows: October 28, "Looking at the Body Through the Eyes of Leonardo da Vinci"; November 25, "Looking at the Body Through the Eyes of Andreas Vesalius"; January 27, "Renaissance Encyclopaedic Mentalities: Athanasius Kircher"; February 24, "Renaissance Encyclopaedic Mentalities: Robert Fludd"; March 31, "Renaissance Encyclopaedic Mentalities: Ulisse Aldrovandi".

Friends of The Osler Library: A Report and an Appeal

Were I to chose a single word to summarize my experience of stewardship over the funds donated to the Osler Library by its Friends during the past year, that word would be "diversity". In my experience, 1987-1988 has seen a greater variety of uses and projects for the Friends fund than at any time in the past. The first and most important priority for the fund is, of course, collections, and our Friends have contributed over \$10,000 to our book budget over the year. This money has been used to buy both current and historic works, and to acquire new serial subscriptions. Probably the single most spectacular purchase was the *Regolamento dei regi spedali di Santa Maria Nuovo e di Bonifazio* di Vincenzo Chiarugi, printed in Florence in 1789. Chiarugi was a pioneer of modern psychiatry in Italy, and his description of the asylum of Santa Maria Nuovo provides a wealth of detail concerning the organization of humane care for the mentally ill. The volume is also graced with extensive and very elegant architectural plans. In making possible the acquisition of works such as this, the Friends are contributing not only to the richness of the Osler Library, but to the intellectual life of McGill University; Chiarugi, for example, has already excited the interest of students in the new graduate programme in architectural history and theory, and of participants in the history of psychiatry seminar.



Collection-building is the Friends' traditional concern, but this year has seen some important innovations in the Library's programmes, innovations which were only made possible by the generosity of its Friends. For example, this year the Library initiated a policy of sponsoring visiting speakers to give public lectures on the history of medicine. Our first visitor was Prof. Jackie Pigeaud of the University of Nantes in France, a distinguished classicist and historian of psychiatry, who spoke on "L'influence de l'Antiquité sur les débuts de la psychiatrie française". We also hosted Prof. Dr. Gundolf Keil, director of the Institute for the History of Medicine at the University of Würzburg in West Germany, who addressed an audience of medievalists, art historians and historians of medicine on "Ortolf von Baierlant (ca. 1250) and the Beginnings of Medical Illustration". Honoraria for both

speakers were provided by the Friends of the Osler Library.

The Friends have also contributed two important pieces of equipment to the Library this year. In conjunction with the Medical Library, we have purchased, using Friends' funds, a microfilm-microfiche reader-printer. The presence of this machine not only permits students and researchers to more readily exploit our extensive microform holdings, but also contributes to our conservation efforts; many of the more important *Bibliotheca Osleriana* books have been microfilmed, and now we can make copies for readers from the film rather than running the risks of photocopying. Our second purchase, a Kaiser copy-stand for 35 mm cameras, will permit some of the work of making slides and photographs of our books to be done in the Library; this is a convenience for our users, and reduces the security and conservation hazards of sending books out for reproduction.

Apart from buying and preserving books, the Friends have also beautified them this year with a newly-redesigned bookplate, illustrated here. Friends' funds also provide for the printing of this *Newsletter*, and they help the Library to meet a wide variety of expenses associated with collection-building and our public programmes. For example, many of our rare books are purchased from Europe; the Friends cover the costs of transatlantic telegrams and telephone calls that enable us to obtain unique items before being pre-empted by European collectors. The Friends' generosity enables us to have books and archival collections professionally appraised, and helps with dozens of services and purchases which, if not always visible to our readers, nonetheless make the difference for us between mere survival and positive growth.

With this issue of the *Osler Library Newsletter*, we launch our appeal to the Friends of the Osler Library for the 1988-1989 academic year. Your support of the Library is vital to its development on every front, and we deeply appreciate all that you make possible for us.

Faith Wallis

**Osler Society of McGill University
Report for the Academic Year 1987-88**

The Osler Society of McGill University was founded 67 years ago by four second year medical students. On a fall evening in 1920, they stood on the corner of Prince Arthur and University Streets and, inspired by the writings of Sir William Osler who had died just one year earlier, decided to organize a special group of medical students. Such an "Osler Society" would have regular meetings at which papers relating to Osler's historical writings and related subjects would be presented.

To this day, the Society continues in a tradition started in 1920 and later firmly established through the efforts of W.W. Francis, the first Osler Librarian. In fact, the

fundamental structure and principles of the Osler Society have remained largely unchanged since its inception. Medical students continue to organize the presentation of papers, seminars, lectures and other events, striving to uphold Sir William's ideal of a liberal education.

The 1987-88 year for the Society started with an introduction to the life of Sir William Osler by Dr. Faith Wallis. Her command of English combined with an obvious enthusiasm for the subject material made an excellent start to the new academic year. It was also a rare opportunity to view some of the Osler Library's treasures.

November 4th was Osler Day, the highlight in the Society's year of events. Dr. Robert Gale, internationally known for his efforts to save many victims of radiation after the Chernobyl disaster, was our Osler Lecturer. He gave an informative and challenging lecture entitled "The Medical Consequences of Nuclear Energy: Lessons from Chernobyl." Following the lecture, a "sold out" Osler Banquet was enjoyed by an enthusiastic group of Oslerites who still have fun passing around Osler's Loving Cup. And few present will forget the "McGill Gastric Quartette's" rendition of "Our Regius Prof."

Our December meeting was a treat for those with an artistic bent. The dynamic Dr. Rigas Bertos, Chairman of McGill's Department of Art History, provided a lively evening of art analysis, allowing our imagination to flow freely as we dissected Titian's "Presentation of the Virgin in the Temple."

In January, for the first time in a number of years, the Society had a film night. With buttered popcorn and soda-drinks in hand we watched and discussed two National Film Board films: "Bethune" and "Bitter Medicine: The Birth of Medicare". The Bethune film was a snapshot view of the life of one of McGill's and Montreal's most colorful personalities, Dr. Norman Bethune. The "Birth of Medicare" film was a fascinating account of the early days of Canadian socialized medicine.

Our February meeting took us from the film screen to real life dramas. Dr. Yves Clermont presented a talk on "The past one hundred years in the Department of Anatomy."

Largely as a result of encouragement from our Honorary President, Dr. William Feindel, the March meeting's format was a return to the Society's original design of students presenting to students. This was a success, so much so that two such evenings are planned for next year.

In April, Dr. Marilyn Li of the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario spoke to us concerning "Women in Medicine". She helped us to recognize that, while many of the issues in medicine are of concern to both men and women, the latter have faced, and continue to face unique challenges.

Our last Society meeting of the academic year in May provided the forum for our Honorary President to talk to us about "Penfield, Osler and the MNI". Dr. Feindel brought to life a remarkable part of our

McGill medical heritage. He explained how Penfield's Montreal Neurological Institute was indirectly linked to the influential writings of Sir William himself.

The academic year 1987-88 was a good one for the Society. Oslerites everywhere will be pleased to know that, sixty-seven years later, the Osler Society of McGill University is alive and well!

David B. Clarke,
President

N. Kevin Wade,
Vice President

Fiona A. Donald,
Secretary Treasurer

Osler Society,
1987-1988

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Editorial Committee for the *Newsletter*:
Edward H. Bensley, Honorary Osler Librarian and Editor; Faith Wallis, History of Medicine Librarian and Associate Editor; Lily Szczygiel, Editorial Assistant.