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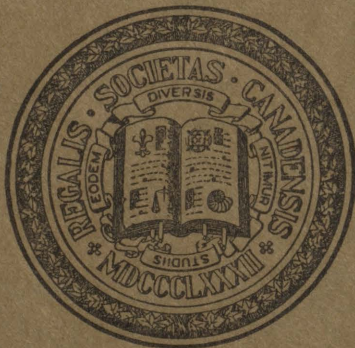
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FROM THE TRANSACTIONS OF THE ROYAL SOCIETY OF CANADA
THIRD SERIES, SECTION II, VOLUME XXIX, 1935

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W. D. Lighthall



OTTAWA
PRINTED FOR THE ROYAL SOCIETY OF CANADA
1935

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The newly-discovered "James and Andrew McGill Journal, 1797"

By W. D. LIGHTHALL, F.R.S.C.

I. *Discovery of the Journal.*

Soon after the deed of donation in 1913, by the late David Ross McCord to McGill University, of the contents of his Canadian historical museum, his friend and representative in the work, the present writer, conceived the idea of recovering some of the James McGill furniture and records which his step-children, the McGill-Desrivières family, had transported after the death of James McGill to the manor house in the half of Stanbridge township bequeathed to them by him in 1813. Of late years the place has been spoken of as "Desrivières", from the railway station there. It was known that the bulk of the furniture, silver and books had been sold at two country auctions many years ago. The second was conducted by old Madame Desrivières, when, in her dotage, she disposed of her remaining silver by permitting any of the neighbours to buy "at their own price." The best pieces were bought by Governor Smith of Vermont and other Americans; although a few chairs and books were resold in Montreal soon afterwards, one being now in the Chateau de Ramezay, and a fine chair and desk in the McCord Museum. A good many of the miniatures and other portraits have since been examined at the museum. Most of the books and papers were taken out and burnt in the yard of the manor house about the time of the first sale. Two lifesize oil portraits and a miniature of McGill have long been owned by the University. It also possesses two unbound cash-books, one of which is of fifty-seven pages, containing personal items from April 10, 1809, to McGill's death in December 1813; the other is the cash-book of his Executors, from January 1814 to July 1828, in fifty-four pages. Many portraits and valuable manuscripts of his partners and friends are now also in the museum. It is the museum of the fur kings and explorers, *inter alia*.

In December 1932 the writer, in the course of his search, became acquainted with a citizen of Bedford, a local antiquarian and merchant, whom he asked to make enquiries. Early in the summer of 1934 he reported the offer by a farmer of this Journal, which the writer, with the intention of presenting it to the University, requested to be bought for him. Ultimately it was secured by the agent, and bought from him by subscription, and presented in December, 1934.

II. *Contents of the Journal.*

The book is not a diary, but a commercial journal, substantially bound in sheepskin, containing about or over 7,000 business and personal items, in 522 large folio pages, and giving the complete business of the mercantile firm of "James and Andrew McGill" from the summer of 1798 to the end of 1800, and thereafter annual summaries and personal items (except for the year 1804) to the end of 1813, when James died. Several entries in 1814 follow. Only the last five pages have anything,—but very little,—in common with the first cash-book, and nothing whatever in common with the second, or Executors' cash-book. The reason why 1804 is blank, and why the subsequent years are summaries and remainders, is that this was the period when the XY, or "New Company", was being absorbed by the "Old Company", from which it had broken off, and both became the North West Company. The McGill business was not incorporated in that fusion. Its connection with the North West Company was a close, friendly one, but independent since 1783; and the McGills devoted themselves to traffic on the Great Lakes and in the territory depending on Detroit and Michillimackinac. The Journal is a treasure-house of exact dates and doings, not only of the McGills, but of all the South West Company and North West Company fur kings, during a most interesting period. As the North West Company's books and records have been lost, the Journal is the only record of the kind.¹

Only a rude sketch can be given here, since protracted studies are necessary to read, collate, fit in, and interpret the whole.

The following names appear: Alexander Henry, Simon McTavish, Joseph Frobisher, Isaac and Andrew Todd, Forsyth Richardson and Company, John Askin, Sir Alexander Mackenzie, William McGillivray, John Ogilvy, Jacob Jordan, John Pangman, Louis and Charles Chaboiliez, Jacques Giasson, the sly John Jacob Astor, Simon Fraser, William McKay, William Hallowell, Norman McLeod, Duncan Cameron, John Gregory, Peter Grant, Sayer and the rest—the honour-roll of Old Montreal's exploration, enterprise, and commercial intelligence.

The McGills had as their agent in Kingston, Richard Cartwright, in Detroit John Askin, in London Phyn Ellice and Company; they had their own branch house in Mackinaw, their correspondents in Quebec, Niagara, New York and the West Indies; and their friends throughout the Far West to the Great Slave Lake and the Pacific. Their own large revenues are recorded in the Journal, as well as many personal details

¹G. C. Davidson, *The North West Company*, preface.

of their manner of living and dying, the names of their house servants, masons, ironworkers, tailors, painters, and other tradesmen. The roll of physicians in the Montreal of 1800 can be made up, and some idea can be gained of such things as inoculations and remedies. The principal physicians were Joseph Brown, Robert Sym, Blake, Leodel, Jones, and Fisher. One comes across the names of the numerous ships which carried the McGill furs from Quebec across the Atlantic, or through the Upper Lakes, or to and from the West Indies; the whole detail of the *voyageur* service; the purchase of wampum in New York for trade with the Indian tribes; the articles of dress of gentlemen and ladies; the imports of English furniture, the repairs and additions to Burnside Manor; the attendances of the Hon. James McGill at the Executive Council, and his fees for such; his subscription to the Beaver Club; his generous gifts to widows, orphans, employees, and sufferers from fires; and his presents "to his sister Margaret in Glasgow—£200", to sons and daughters of his friends—"Board and education of little A. Todd"—and to his own wife and stepchildren—all these afford a good picture of that noble gentleman who planned and gave McGill College out of the fullness of a loving heart and far-sighted mind, and to whom generations of his intellectual children can ever look as their model, with well-founded veneration and affection.

Among odd James McGill items are: "paid Mrs. Hays for taffaty", "paid Molson for beer" (frequently), "two decanters in 1796", "stove-pipe in counting house", "two small trunks for Captain Desrivières", "F. Desrivières (law) books", "visit to Niagara" and "return from Kingston" (in which a special canoe and five picked *voyageurs* figure), "voyageurs fund and wives", "raft", "summer house", "subscription to the Assembly", "hats" for himself and Miss Porteous, "1 barrel flour to General Hospital" (Grey Nuns), "trees and melon seeds", "rent and millinery", "book-chest", "sewing silk", etc. James Swan, the faithful head clerk, was well looked after.

His brother Andrew also "paid Molson for beer", imported furniture from England, bought "a cariole", "a rat trap", "a double stove", "playing cards", "suit for servant", "a calash", and won a "prize in lottery". James and Andrew together subscribed "to building church at Sandwich" (opposite Detroit), and "to the fire", and bought "gold scales" for their banking operations.

The schoolmaster John Strachan (afterwards Bishop of Toronto) came out from Scotland in 1799 *viâ* New York. He later, in 1807, married Ann Wood, the young daughter of Dr. John and Mary Wood, and widow of Andrew McGill, the brother of James McGill, who now

received him, sending for him and his trunk, buying him "a beaver cap", and passing him on to Kingston, with a letter to Richard Cartwright, who engaged him as tutor to his children, and started him on his notable career. Later Strachan was to advise James McGill regarding the proposed college.

Under the heading "Todd, McGill & Co." are: "1/3 of a Montreal Bank note" (before 1800), "a suit of clothes to James the Cooper", and many other items. Under "Estate John McGill" appear particulars of his illness and death: "paid Dr. Brown for shrub and wine" (bitters?), "paid Rev. Mr. Young for funeral service", "sexton", letter-carrier "Langhorn delivering funeral cards", "funeral cards for Mackinaw", "hearse", "Dr. Fisher's demand", "tombstone", "tomb railing", "moving tomb to new cemetery", "Beck [notary] for his will", "list of notes", "sale", "paid Mrs. McGill for horse, cariote, etc., sold Dr. Sym", "legacies", "six gold memorial rings for his intimate friends".

Both John and Andrew, as well as Margaret, bequeathed the bulk of their estates to their brother James.

The Indian trade articles include, Castoreum, wampum (from New York), watap (for mending canoes), "Indian Works", Indian shirts, "silver works", "beaver traps and crooked knives", ceintures, three-point blankets, Osnaburghs, potash kettles, copper and tin kettles. "Bad money" also turns up; also "Madeira" and "Fayal" wines.

Among many entries, Forsyth, Richardson and Company, the McGills' forwarding agents, have "Niagara and The Carrying Place", and "Express to the Mississippi".

The pay drafts of many military officers named were discounted by the McGills and their correspondents, and sent on to army headquarters in London. Among such were Sir John Johnson, Chief Joseph Brant, Colonel Robertson, Major A. S. de Peyster, Schoedde, and a long list representative of the various Loyalist corps and garrison regiments.

Some of the vessels serving as carriers for the furs and supplies were the *Adventure*, the *Aimwell*, the *Auldjo*, the *Adriatic*, the *Albion* (from Jamaica), the *Ariadne*, the *Adeona*, the *Betsy*, the *Brothers*, the *Breeze*, the *Caroline* (captured in 1798), the *Desire*, the *Drummond*, the *Eweretta*, the *Experiment*, the *Fortuna*, the *Hazard*, the *Harrower*, the *Hope*, the *Lively* (wrecked), the *Raikes*, the *Saguinan*, the *Simcoe*, the *Triton*, and "the Fall Fleet". This list, though incomplete, might be compared with the list of ships carrying furs out of Quebec, given in Gordon C. Davidson's book *The North West Company*, p. 207 *et seq.* The McGills also received, aided, and were the agents and bankers of the famous colony of French Revolution *émigrés*, who settled in Upper

Canada in 1798 under Lieutenant-General Comte Joseph de Puisaye, and included the Comte de Chalus, the Marquise de Beauvoir, Quetton St. George, and others. The Journal contains scores of entries relating to the advent, assistance, and operations of "the French Gentlemen".

These particulars are only samples out of the large number of entries. Someone else will in due time properly collate the McGill documents, and fit them in with the Cartwright letters in Kingston, the Burton collection in Detroit, and the published and unpublished Masson manuscripts in McGill Library. The McGill documents include McGill's diary, the minutes of the Beaver Club, title deeds, contracts, etc. The Hudson's Bay Company records in London and Winnipeg, and other publications and materials should also be collated.

The premises occupied by James and Andrew McGill for their business at the period of their Journal were the very large, long, iron-shuttered, cut stone buildings situated at the present south corner of St. Paul Street and St. Lawrence Boulevard, and bought by James McGill on October 13, 1792. There was then a house on the property; but the substantial cut stone front of two stories seems to suggest the correctness of a phrase in the 1813 deed of acquittance, "a two-story stone house, a vault, and other buildings thereon, erected by him the said James McGill." The lot formerly fronted only on St. Paul Street, being bounded in the rear by the military "Watch Road", or *chemin de rond*, which ran all round inside the city wall of French times. After 1801 the wall was gradually taken down by the Fortification Commission; and in 1805 James McGill acquired the site of the "Watch Road" behind, giving himself another front on Commissioners' Street, that is to say, looking out over the St. Lawrence river, and including the side of the outer fortification wall there, and also the inner wall of this road, as stated in the title-deeds. James, having received the shares of John and Andrew, under their wills (made respectively in 1797 and 1804), sold the premises on September 17, 1808. The front building contains interesting French vaults of an older building, along St. Paul Street. So also does the beautiful St. Dizier mansion and warehouse adjoining it on the west, and running back along St. Dizier lane. In regard to this form of vaults, a number still remain in neighbouring commercial buildings, masked by the stately front elevations of the later nineteenth century Montreal. Some resemble the splendid early French vaultings of the Chateau de Ramezay; and many walls in the vicinity are still older and very deserving of study. In fact, old French Montreal is largely represented underground. St. Gabriel Street, the heart of the fur-trade district, was, before the new Court House replaced a large

block of old buildings, a most interesting quarter. Its principal monument was the magnificent three-storey gabled cut stone counting-house of Forsyth, Richardson and Company, marked "1793" inside its high-walled courtyard on the east side of the street. The same firm and other partners of the North West Company also owned practically all the west side of the street, composed of old French houses, one of them vaulted on the ground floor, and all connected together by cellar doors, so that in the eighteen-nineties I have walked by these underground doors from cellar to cellar nearly the whole length of the street.

Another question on which the Journal may throw some light when minutely studied is: why did the McGill book-keeping stop its daily detail in 1803, and thereafter confine itself to summaries? Was the business acquired by the North West Company? What afterwards was the connection of the "House at Mackinaw" and the South West Company? I leave these questions for others to answer.

Ultimately, after the War of 1812, preceded by the Louisiana Purchase of 1806, the United States forbade the trade of Mackinaw to others than Americans; and Astor bought out the McGill rights. By that time James, the last of his family, was dead. Irving's *Astoria* gives part of the explanations.

Among other questions I have not attempted to answer fully is that of the residences of the McGills; but it was probably soon after his marriage to Charlotte Guillemain, widow of Amable Desrivieres, in December 1776,² that James bought the house on Notre Dame Street, just west of the Chateau de Ramezay, which had been inhabited by the Baron de Becancour during the last years of the French period. It had been owned till 1776 by Thomas Walker, the revolutionary magistrate. In James McGill's Will he bequeathed it to François Desrivieres. It had most pleasant outlooks; in front, over the garden of the Jesuits, and beyond to Mont Royal; on the west, over the garden of the Chateau de Vaudreuil; and on the south, over the city wall, the river, and St. Helen's island to the immense plain with its solitary "Monteregian hills". Close by was the former house of Charlotte Guillemain's lawyer father, which also overlooked the Vaudreuil garden and the river.

Did John McGill then occupy the St. Paul Street house? And where did Andrew live? Was it at the house in Notre Dame Street, next the old warehouse there, on the north corner of the intersection of St.

²Their marriage contract before *notaires* Sanguinet and Paquin is dated December 2, 1776. At that time she was keeping a shop in her house in St. François-Xavier Street on the north-west corner of Hospital Street, facing the east wall of the Seminary garden.

Lambert Hill, which James afterward received by Andrew's Will, subject to a life rent to Mrs. Andrew, and to the Agreement of James with her after Andrew's funeral on August 3, 1805?

When did James acquire the farm near Mont Royal, named by him "Burnside Manor" from the brook at its feet? Alexander Henry describes him to John Askin as if recently established there in August, 1804. And on the map of Montreal of 1801 he appears as proprietor. Did he use it at first as a summer residence only? And did he make it into an all-year home, and if so, when? Was this the meaning of his constant engagements of "Telfer the mason" for repairs, additions, and improvements, and of the "summer house", "whitewashing", and such items? (Telfer was the builder of St. Gabriel Street church in 1793.) A portion of the lower storey, the stone east wall, with door and two windows, can still be seen in the lane behind an apartment house on McGill College Avenue, where it is incorporated into that building. This fragment shows a high above-ground basement, such as was sometimes contained in Scottish cottages of that period, having usually a stone flag pavement throughout the ground level and extended outside under the *galérie*. Mr. Samuel Hyman, who lived for sixteen years in the premises as a boy and had intimate recollections of the "Burnside" basement wall, tells me this wall extended about forty feet on the lane, and about fifty feet on the yard of the apartment, and the same dimensions on the other two sides of the original house. A wall was inside the manor house, at the west end of the basement. The late Mr. Henry Birks, senior, supplied me, for the museum, with a plan of the main floor of the building, from his recollection as a boy when his father was tenant. The house was surrounded by a great walled garden. Its picturesque site occupied the place of the palisaded town of Hochelaga, visited by Jacques Cartier in 1535. A fine memory sketch and etching, by Mr. William Busby Lambe, shows the "summerhouse" built by Telfer in the foreground by the "burn".

Robert Hamilton, writing to John Askin of Detroit from Queenston on August 10, 1804, says: "Mr. McGill we found in perfect health. To me he appears as young as he was Twenty Years ago. In a very comodious Country House about a mile from Town, he seems to possess about as much joy and comfort as generally falls to the Lott of humanity."

The position is pictured in the Whitefield "View of Montreal" of 1850, which shows the cottage, the garden wall, and on the west edge the extramural "dump" of Hochelaga, with a tall Lombardy poplar tree upon the latter. Here McGill entertained his neighbours of the sur-

rounding country estates,—Simon McTavish, Joseph Frobisher, Sir Alexander Mackenzie, the Hon. William McGillivray, Colonel William McKay, William Hallowell, and others. Here he spent his last years in ease and affluence, as well as universal popularity, occupying high civil and military positions. Here too he planned his college, in the company of Isaac Todd, Rev. John Strachan and other friends, and bequeathed to it his forty-six acres and ten thousand pounds.³ Sometimes, as he planted his "trees and melon seeds", and walked to the far end of his garden wall, it was like him to have thoughtfully picked up on the "dump" some shard of the famous incised pottery, or perhaps some ornamented Indian pipe; and to have speculated on the bygone race who were his predecessors, and to have been reminded of the primitive Red Men of his early adventures in the distant West.

³From the *John Askin Papers*, Volume II:

(Isaac Todd to John Askin, p. 776)

"Montreal, 3rd Feb. 1814. . . . My dear friend, I wrote you the 30th December informing you of the death of our mutual friend Mr. McGill, and that he had bequeathed to you all his lands on the American side of the Detroit River"

(Alexander Henry to John Askin, p. 782)

"Montreal, 9th May 1815. My dear old friend there is only one alive in Montreal that was here when I came. What do you think of our Beaver Club which commenced in 1786 and consisted of 16 members; and I the only one alive. Our late friend McGill was the last, and a great loss he was to Montreal. He always remained friendly to the last and was much regretted. I was happy to hear he was so friendly to you. His sudden death deprived him of doing more good to those who wanted it: several who he mentioned to me shortly before his death—for he had no idea of going off half an hour before he died. Mrs. McGill is left comfortable but young Desrivieres will it is said have £60,000"

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