

“Social Enjoyment and the Promotion of Arts and Letters” The Pen and Pencil Club of Montreal 1890–1914

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Résumé de l'article

Le Pen and Pencil Club of Montreal est l'une des nombreuses associations fondées à Montréal au tournant du vingtième siècle. Puisqu'il offrait à ses membres l'occasion de faire circuler leurs oeuvres et de recevoir les commentaires d'autres artistes et écrivains, le club apparaît comme l'une des forces opérant dans ce que Robert Darnton appelle le « circuit de communication », force qui crée un sous-circuit itératif entre l'auteur et l'éditeur, l'auteur en tant que lecteur et le lecteur en tant qu'auteur, avant même que l'oeuvre n'atteigne l'éditeur. L'article examine le fonctionnement du Pen and Pencil Club, ainsi que le rôle de médiateur qu'il jouait entre la production et la circulation des écrits. En prenant part à divers débats pancanadiens sur la politique, la culture et l'art, ses membres ont contribué à leur façon au développement d'un nationalisme culturel en émergence auquel la publication de leurs oeuvres a par la suite fait écho.



“SOCIAL ENJOYMENT AND THE PROMOTION OF ARTS AND LETTERS”: The Pen and Pencil Club of Montreal 1890–1914

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ABSTRACT

The Pen and Pencil Club of Montreal is one of the numerous associations founded in Montreal at the turn of the twentieth century. In offering its members the opportunity to circulate their work and receive informal feedback from other artists and writers, the club emerges as one of the forces in what Robert Darnton calls the “communications circuit,” one that creates a smaller, iterative circuit joining the author and the reader, the author as reader and the reader as author, before any work reaches the publisher. This article thus examines the workings of the Pen and Pencil Club and its mediating role between production and circulation of written texts. The Club’s members participated in nation-wide debates on politics, culture, and art, and thus contributed in their own way to the development of a nascent Canadian cultural nationalism, one then communicated through the publication of their works.

RÉSUMÉ

Le Pen and Pencil Club of Montreal est l’une des nombreuses associations fondées à Montréal au tournant du vingtième siècle. Puisqu’il offrait à ses membres l’occasion de faire circuler leurs œuvres et de recevoir les commentaires d’autres artistes et écrivains, le club apparaît comme l’une des forces opérant dans ce que Robert Darnton appelle le « circuit de communication », force qui crée un sous-circuit itératif entre l’auteur et l’éditeur, l’auteur en tant que lecteur et le lecteur en tant qu’auteur, avant même que l’œuvre n’atteigne l’éditeur. L’article examine le fonctionnement du Pen and Pencil Club, ainsi que le rôle de médiateur qu’il jouait entre la production et la circulation des écrits. En prenant part à divers débats pancanadiens sur la politique, la culture et l’art, ses membres ont contribué à leur façon au développement d’un nationalisme culturel en émergence auquel la publication de leurs œuvres a par la suite fait écho.

Keywords

Clubs, associations, sociability, arts et lettres, Canadian nationalism

Mots-clés

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The Pen and Pencil Club of Montreal is one of the numerous literary and artistic associations founded in Montreal at the turn of the twentieth century. The Club, whose principal aim was “social enjoyment and the promotion of the arts and letters,”¹ simultaneously answered its members’ need to socialize and their desire for self-improvement, and allowed them to invest time and energy in the development of artistic and literary life in Montreal. Its first meeting was held on March 5, 1890, at the Dorchester Street residence of William Hope, who was joined by five additional founding members: the painters William Brymner and Robert Harris, and the amateur poets and writers John Try-Davies, R. W. Boodle, and John Edward Logan. When it finally disbanded in 1960, the Club had long since ceased to be the exclusive, elitist centre of cultural authority it had been in its golden age, the years 1890–1914. But of course, by that time, literary and artistic clubs as a whole had lost the popularity they had gained in the last decades of the nineteenth century.² The Pen and Pencil Club is thus emblematic of the rise and fall of literary and artistic associations that straddled the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Its creation exemplifies the rising popularity of clubs, societies, and associations in Canada at the time, which Mary Lu Macdonald describes as a “social phenomenon which included athletic clubs, dining clubs, Mechanics Institutes, and fraternal and national organizations, all of which brought together like-minded individuals for self-improvement, mutual support and human good-fellowship.”³ While these general goals were ubiquitous, some clubs and societies developed more precise objectives. The Pen and Pencil Club was a specific kind of association, whose aim was the development of a Canadian culture, whether through the promotion of art and literature or, more broadly, through the discussion of social and political issues, and which included, among others, the Women’s Art Society of Montreal (1894), the Saint James Literary Society (1898), the Canadian Club of Montreal (1904), and the Arts Club of Montreal (1912). In offering its members the opportunity to circulate their work and receive informal feedback from other artists and writers, the Club,

whose membership was exclusively male, emerges as an additional force in what Robert Darnton calls the “communications circuit,”⁴ one that creates a smaller, iterative circuit joining the author and the reader—the author as reader and the reader as author—before any work reaches the publisher.

The bi-weekly meetings of the Club, during which members were asked to submit original works inspired by specific subjects, were an occasion for members to receive criticism prior to publication, and to make revisions before disseminating those works to a broader readership. While the rising phenomenon of literary and artistic associations to which the Pen and Pencil Club belonged blossomed in rural as well as urban areas, there is no doubt that the increased urbanization of Quebec and Ontario contributed significantly to their proliferation.⁵ Mere growth of population, however, cannot single-handedly explain the abundance of clubs and societies across the country. Part of that explanation is provided by Heather Murray in *Come, Bright Improvement!*, a history of nineteenth-century literary societies in rural Ontario. Murray demonstrates that the quest for self- and mutual improvement was indeed a wide-scale phenomenon, not simply an urban one. A complementary explanation for the rise of clubs, societies, and associations in Canada is provided by Peter Clark, in the conclusion to his extensive study of *British Clubs and Societies*. Clark attributes the appearance of clubs such as the Pen and Pencil to Britain’s “export of public sociability,” which he refers to as a one of the Empire’s “striking achievement[s].”⁶ The club formula, already established in Britain, was exported to its colonies. Canadian clubs and societies were therefore mostly copies of their British counterparts. But their existence and proliferation had tangible repercussions on culture in Canada.

While Heather Murray has paved the way for discussing the role of clubs and literary societies in shaping a Canadian readership, little has been said about the impact of these clubs and societies on the production of arts and letters in Canada. Murray’s approach seeks to reconsider the act of reading as “a group and public activity, rather than an individual or interior enterprise.”⁷ My own approach focuses particularly on the creative output of the Pen and Pencil Club and its mediating role between production and circulation. It aims to redefine the Club members’ creative process as one that both reflected and influenced the Club’s values, and to explore the way in which the social network that connected the Club to other social entities

influenced the published material of its members. On a local level, outside of their writing, the Club's members produced works that marked the specific cultural and geographical landscape of Montreal, such as George William Hill's monument to George-Étienne Cartier in Fletcher's Field or Edmond Dyonnet's portraits, which were hung in well-to-do households. But through these works, they also participated in nation-wide debates on politics, culture, and art, and thus contributed in their own way to the development of a nascent Canadian cultural nationalism, one then communicated through the publication of works by the Club's members. The beginnings of this Canadian cultural nationalism are inextricable from the rise of imperialism, which Carl Berger situates in the mid-1880s and which he defines as a "movement for the closer union of the British Empire through economic and military co-operation and through political changes which would give the dominions influence over imperial policy" (3). As we will see, the doctrine of imperialism pervaded the Club's literary and artistic output. Thus, by allowing writers and artists to interact in a social context defined by national questions and by providing a creative impetus for their works, the Pen and Pencil Club represents an iterative loop wedged between the author and the publisher in the communications circuit of its members' published work.

The Pen and Pencil Club appeared in the midst of what John Daniel Logan and Donald French call the "First Renaissance in Canadian Native and National Literature," which, they claim, began with the publication, in 1880, of Charles G. D. Roberts's *Orion and Other Poems* and ended with the publication of Pauline Johnson's *Canadian Born* in 1903.⁸ The foundation of the Club coincides with the rise of what they call the "group of *systemic* poets," later known as the Confederation group of Canadian poets. According to D. M. R. Bentley's description, this circle of poets functioned very much like a club which, despite its "geographical diversity and lack of a formal manifesto, ... did have a centre, a credo, and a duration, but also sanctions judgments about the degree to which even its core members ... participated in its activities and program."⁹ These attributes of the Confederation group of poets both underscore the significance of the club formula at the turn of the century in Canada and stress the importance, for poets, as for artists, of legitimizing their craft through the recognition of their peers.

In Montreal more specifically, the Pen and Pencil Club appeared in the midst of a thriving community of visual artists, where literary production was nonetheless somewhat stagnant. As a result of the construction of the Notre-Dame-de-Lourdes Chapel at the intersection of rues Ste-Catherine and St-Denis in the 1870s, the inauguration of the Art Association of Montreal gallery in 1879, and the rise of the illustrated press in the 1880s, the visual arts in Montreal flourished in the 1890s.¹⁰ It is no exaggeration to assert that the most prominent artists in Montreal at the time, artists such as William Brymner, Robert Harris, Edmond Dyonnet, Henri Julien, Henri Beau, and Maurice Cullen, were all members of the Pen and Pencil Club. The visual arts in Montreal developed in part because of the multiplication of institutions dedicated to the instruction and dissemination of art. In addition, the growth of the population ensured a increasing market for portraits.

The dissemination of literature in Montreal, as elsewhere in Canada, was effected primarily through newspapers, journals, and magazines. Thus, poets and writers in Montreal at the turn of the century tended to cluster around associations and periodicals. In addition to *Arcadia*, *The Dominion Illustrated*, and *The University Magazine* (McGill University), the main English-language newspapers of the city (*The Gazette*, *The Herald*, and *The Montreal Star*) also regularly published poetry and serialized fiction. Those whom Carole Gerson calls the “cultural power-mongers of Victorian Canada,” among which figure Club members John Reade, editor of *The Montreal Gazette*, and John Talon-Lesperance, editor of *The Dominion Illustrated* (both of whom were also members of the Royal Society of Canada), often subordinated their poetry to their journalism.¹¹ The same is true of the journalists and poets Arthur Reid and John Macfarlane.

In the years after its foundation, the Pen and Pencil of Montreal admitted new members into the Club through a strict procedure of nomination and election. According to the constitution, once an aspirant member was proposed, voting would take place and one black ball in ten at balloting signified refusal, although there is no mention of such an occurrence in the minutes of the meetings. As a rule, nominated members were obliged to hand in a literary or artistic contribution in order to be considered for election. While this rule was on occasion suspended in the subsequent years, it is a testament to the Club’s sense of exclusivity and to the members’

desire to find themselves among artists and writers who shared at least some of their social, political, and aesthetic values, all of which were tied up, as will become evident, in an imperialist ideology. New members were invited to join every year at the rate of two or three per year, but the quality of the candidates was of such importance that the Club could also abstain from electing any member, as indeed it did in 1914 when it was recorded that “many names were mentioned, yet although it was acknowledged that they were quite clever and in many ways quite estimable persons yet it was felt that none of them quite measured up to that high standard of perfection that it has ever been the aim of the club to maintain.”¹² The exclusivity of the Club ensured that it could continue developing a collective ethos and identity.

Looking back to the first years of the twentieth century as part of his “Essay in Character” upon the death of John McCrae, a fellow Pen and Pencil Club member, Andrew Macphail expresses this feeling of exclusivity:

There was in Montreal an institution known as “The Pen and Pencil Club.” No one now living remembers a time when it did not exist. It was a peculiar club. It contained no member who should not be in it; and no one was left out who should be in. The number was about a dozen.¹³

The Club thus viewed itself as nothing short of a cultural elite. It invited both French- and English-speaking members to join, as long as they were judged acceptable candidates. Although the identities of many of its members are lost to memory, Macphail’s comment also rings true given the numerous writers, artists, and public figures that emerged from the Club. In addition to the prominent artists previously referenced, the Club elected among its members the distinguished architects Percy Nobbs and William Sutherland Maxwell, as well as the sculptor George Hill. It also admitted to its ranks such poets as Frederick George Scott, George Murray, and John McCrae, and such well-known writers as Stephen Leacock, Andrew Macphail, Edward William Thompson, and Bernard Keble Sandwell.

The Club met fortnightly on Saturday evenings, but finding a venue was always a challenge. During the first two years of its existence, the Club met at the newly built Montreal Racket Club, where they could rent the space for \$5 an evening, but an increase in fees forced them to relocate. Over the

following years, meetings were usually held in the studio of one of the members; for over 16 years, the Club met in the studio of Edmond Dyonnet.¹⁴ On numerous occasions, the Club agreed to form a committee to enquire after a permanent locale. All options were explored, including the possibility of building a Pen and Pencil Club, but eventually that idea was abandoned and the Club continued meeting where it could. Although the venue was precarious, the relaxed ambiance of these studios allowed members to behave informally despite the rules of order dictating the procedure of the meetings.

The Club's constitution states that its purpose was "social enjoyment and the promotion of the arts and letters." To ensure the first aim, alcohol was always available for purchase and the minutes of the meetings confirm that there certainly was a great deal of "social enjoyment" had at all the meetings. The minutes recount, for example, a somewhat ridiculous occurrence at the meeting on November 14, 1914, when Club member Kenneth Macpherson "lost a cigar. Several members with inclinations toward unseemly conduct used the occasion to pass equivocal remarks, and to create disturbance. The president [John Edward Hoare] however showed himself worthy of the mace and quelled unruliness. The cigar was found where Macpherson had placed it, after the members had been searched." The jocular tone of the minutes indicates that these men met in a genial atmosphere, a space that was decidedly male. Indeed, although it is stated nowhere in the constitution, women were prohibited from joining the Club, or rather, they were simply not asked to join.¹⁵ Perhaps for this reason, Andrew Macphail refers to the Club as a "home for the spirit wearied by the week's work," that is, as a place to unwind, away from the troubles of work and the tensions of the domestic sphere.¹⁶

The Club, however, was more than a simple social venue. It offered its members a space in which they could engage with each other's work. Each member was required to submit a contribution on alternate meetings. During the first six years of its existence, the Club collected these contributions and compiled them in large scrapbooks. The rule concerning frequency of contributions was rigorously observed in the Club's first few years, but was eventually disregarded, and the role of the Club therefore shifted slightly, from motivating creation within dictated limits to providing a limited public whom the members consulted for feedback as their literary

or artistic projects progressed. Similarly, the members were initially given a subject or theme to develop for their contributions. These subjects reflect the ethos of their time and reveal an interest in current events. When Prime Minister Wilfrid Laurier was debating whether to send Canadian troops to South Africa, for example, contributions were submitted under the theme of “The Boer.” A few years later, as the provincial capital was preparing to celebrate the three hundredth anniversary of its foundation by Samuel de Champlain, the Club met under the theme of “Quebec,” a meeting that yielded a published poem by John McCrae. In time, however, members showed an increasing disregard for the proposed subjects and began submitting the projects on which they were currently working until eventually, in 1909, the suggested subjects were dropped altogether.

While many of the visual artists lived from their art, most of them by teaching, almost none of the poets and writers earned their living as such. They were mostly men who worked in the liberal professions, but a great number of them were professors at McGill University, prime recruiting grounds for the Club. Their profile matches Mary Lu Macdonald’s description of pre-1850 writers in Canada: “because they were all dependent on other activities for their income, writing had to be a leisure activity of secondary importance.” While a great number of clubs and literary societies of the time demonstrate a considerable interest in literature, the priorities for writers included first and foremost an “income on which to live.”¹⁷ The Pen and Pencil Club thus offered its amateur poets and writers a place to receive, if not friendly, at least gentlemanly criticism before attempting to publish their works. In this way, it played a central role in the artistic and literary careers of its members: “many a painting long since famous, many a novel, book of poetry, treatise, or piece of music, was first thoroughly discussed, possibly satirized, criticized, poked fun at, torn to pieces and rebuilt from lively discussion.”¹⁸ As a nod to the literary and artistic aspirations of its lesser-known members, the Pen and Pencil held an annual festival during which it proposed a toast “in memory of unrecognized genius” that the newest member of the Club was compelled to answer with a speech.

The Club’s “promotion of the arts and letters” extended beyond its own sphere and materialized in the form of concrete ventures. On several occasions, its members made financial contributions to artistic or literary

projects. After the deaths of two of its much-loved members, Edward Burrough Brownlow in 1896 and John Edward Logan (Barry Dane) in 1916, the Club published their poems at its own expense. In 1895, hearing of the approaching visit of French painter Jean-François Raffaëlli to Montreal, Edmond Dyonnet proposed that “if the Art Association does not find it possible to undertake the task of introducing Raphaëlli as a lecturer, the Pen and Pencil Club [should] do so. [William] Hope supported this proposal and thought that the club could guarantee the amount necessary viz. \$150 for two lectures.”¹⁹ While the Arts Association did ultimately absorb the cost of Raffaëlli’s visit, the Club embraced other opportunities to make significant contributions to Canadian culture. The minutes of a meeting in 1899 reveal that shortly after the death of Archibald Lampman, “the secretary had a letter from Mr. D. C. Scott of Ottawa received through William McLennan asking the cooperation of the Club in the publication of the new edition of Lampman’s poems and he was instructed to convey Mr. Scott an assurance of heartiest sympathy on the part of the club,”²⁰ though the minutes do not mention how much was eventually donated to that effect. A few years later, the Club raised the \$50 necessary to erect a bust of William McLennan, a Pen and Pencil Club member, in the Fraser Library and the McGill Library.²¹ The monetary value of these contributions is not negligible, but these instances of financial support are also evidence that the Club members shared a desire to stimulate the development of a Canadian culture in spite of their disparate interests.

The meetings of the Pen and Pencil Club always followed the same order of procedure: the chairman “solemnly declared the bar open” and “conversation began to flow,” after which the artists were called on to exhibit their work, followed by the writers, and, finally, the musicians.²² Stephen Leacock humorously describes a prototypical meeting:

It was the routine of the Club that the artists should first show to us their latest work. We, of the ‘pen’ class, like George the Third with the British Constitution, admired where we couldn’t understand, and took a more than equal vengeance by reading aloud our current writings. Our poets, Jack McCrae, and John Logan (a tear to his rugged memory), made but a small demand. A very little poetry goes a long way. But Andrew [Macphail] and I were the chief sinners. I can still call up a vision of the kindly club, drawn up in a horseshoe of armchairs, the

room darkened, and apparently getting darker all the time, listening to the measured tones of an essay-writer reading his essay, with the full consciousness that even when he had finished, another essay writer would pick up the torch. Somnolence gained them; they tied themselves in knots in their chairs; or broke from the ranks to dive behind the curtains where the whiskey and soda was.²³

Leacock exaggerates the divide between artists and writers. In truth, while the masters of the pen and of the pencil were not exactly qualified to discuss the merits of each other's work, it was common for them to do so. As Macphail explains, “[William] Brymner and the other artists would discourse upon writings, and [Thomas Joseph Workman] Burgess and the other writers would discourse upon pictures.”²⁴ This kind of interdisciplinarity was at the heart of the Pen and Pencil Club. Artists often tried their hand at writing. William Brymner submitted written works on several occasions, expressing his views in essays such as “Subjective Progress in Arts” and “Marriage Festivals in France, England and Canada,” both of which were subsequently published in *The University Magazine*.²⁵ Conversely, writers often ventured to offer comments and criticism on sketches and paintings. During one meeting, the minutes humorously recount how “[William] Languedoc took exception to the position of the woman in Brymner's nude, arguing that a woman would never take that position. A heated discussion ensued. [Bernard Keble] Sandwell went to play the piano and everyone surrendered so totally, that they assumed positions akin to Brymner's sketch.”²⁶

The Pen and Pencil Club provided more than a creative impetus in a relaxed atmosphere. It was part of what Peter Clark describes as a “social institution”²⁷ comprised of social associations and represents one of the active participants in what Mary Vipond calls the “web of personal relationships and friendships which linked together a ‘network’ of professionals, academics, business men, and other members of the English-Canadian élite.”²⁸ This social network spread throughout Montreal and enabled “informal patterns of communication” between the members of different clubs and societies.²⁹ Its complexity is illustrated by the fact that almost all Pen and Pencil Club members were also members of at least one other club, and sometimes even belonged to several clubs and associations simultaneously. The poet George Murray, for example, belonged to the Literary Club, the Athenaeum Club, the Shakespeare Club, the St. James

Literary Club, and the Royal Society of Canada in addition to the Pen and Pencil Club.

While the social network of Montreal consisted primarily of associations such as clubs and literary societies, it also included alternative centres of sociability such as journals, schools, and churches. As a part of this web, the Pen and Pencil Club developed its closest connections with McGill University, from which more than one fifth of all new members were recruited between 1890 and 1914, and *The University Magazine*, which Andrew Macphail took over in 1907 (10 years after joining the Pen and Pencil) and managed until he left for the front in 1914. Under Macphail's leadership, *The University Magazine* published 12 of Stephen Leacock's articles and eleven of John McCrae's poems, which unquestionably bolstered the latter's reputation as a poet. Macphail himself published no fewer than 43 pieces of political commentary and social criticism over this period. But *The University Magazine* also published several articles by Bernard Keble Sandwell, William Brymner, Frederick George Scott, Edward William Thompson, Warwick Chipman, John Edward Hoare, John McNaughton, John L. Todd, and Frederick Parker Walton, all members of the Pen and Pencil Club. In fact, between 1907 and 1914, a total of 12 members of the Club published over 89 pieces in *The University Magazine*, including essays, poems, translations, and short stories.

Almost all of the works published in *The University Magazine* by Pen and Pencil members had previously been submitted as contributions for Club meetings. As Macphail, like his fellow members of the Pen and Pencil Club, advocated a conservative ideology based on tradition and the imperial order, the magazine became "the vehicle for a particular ideological current, conservative and imperialist."³⁰ Thus, if the Club was the crucible in which imperialist views were probed, exchanged, and articulated, *The University Magazine* was one of the ways in which the Club circulated these views among both the academic and general population. The imperialist ideals of those who published in *The University Magazine* are easily discernible in articles such as Stephen Leacock's "What Shall we do about the Navy?". But many other members produced an artistic or literary output in which varying forms of nationalism are also implicit. As the following discussion demonstrates, the way they conceived of their country was shaped by their views on history as a nation-building narrative.

In its first years, when subjects were still jointly chosen for contributions, the Pen and Pencil Club often turned to nation-building myths for inspiration. On several occasions, the subjects looked back to historical figures of the continent or suggested themes tangentially related to history, such as the subjects of “Ghosts” or “Immortality.” The minutes reveal that John Edward Logan submitted two sonnets, entitled “Columbus” and “Champlain,” as contributions for two meetings held on these respective subjects in 1890. The two sonnets were included in *Verses*, Logan’s posthumous collection of poetry. Both poems portray their subjects as heroic figures whose true feat was to open up new spaces for the expansion and glorification of what would eventually become the British Empire. Columbus is depicted as a “strong soul” who, “fearless,” stood “prophetic eyed” on his “frail deck” until “a new world lay stretched before.” Similar vocabulary is used to describe Champlain, who is portrayed as “steadfast, a strong soul / That heeded not of night, or storm, or dole; / but with great purpose cleft the tempestuous spray.” Even “the powers of Neptune” are “impotent” before him, and he stands before the “vista of the golden ways” as “one whose arm would win the glory of the ages.” While Columbus transforms the new continent into “the bright tiara of the Occident,” Champlain is impelled by the force of posterity to enter the Saint Lawrence River: “there did he lift / Alone, the latch of Empire and strode in.”³¹ Logan’s sonnets present these two men as emissaries of the Empire and ideals of virility, while recuperating historical moments (Columbus’s arrival in America and Champlain’s initial voyage down the Saint Lawrence) as foundational myths.

An examination of the unpublished submissions of other members under the subjects of “Columbus” and “Champlain,” held in the scrapbooks of the Club, reveals that Logan’s recuperation of historical figures as ideals of masculinity is representative of the Club’s militaristic imperial ethos, one that dictated the necessity for Canada in the late nineteenth century to “take up military responsibilities and thereby attain national status.”³² For example, during the meeting of December 13, 1890, held on the subject of “Champlain,” the poet Edward Burrough Brownlow submitted a sonnet that portrays Champlain as anointed with “pure heroic chris” (fig. 1). Brownlow’s glorification of Champlain is laden with imperialistic overtones: Champlain’s “one grand wish” is “to advance” his “country.” This, it is implied, can be achieved only because Champlain is both a military and

religious man, having taken a “double vow on sword and crucifix.” While Champlain’s loyalty is to “Rome and France,” his “deeds of mighty aim” make him a worthy ancestor for French-Canadians and, by extension, an acceptable mythical figure for the country. This description of Champlain as a heroic figure becomes a way to reconfigure the city of Quebec, the site of Wolfe’s victory over Montcalm, as a locus of imperial nationalism: “Thou hast this monument of endless fame / Quebec, the record of thy patriotism, / To keep immortal thy most lustrous name.”

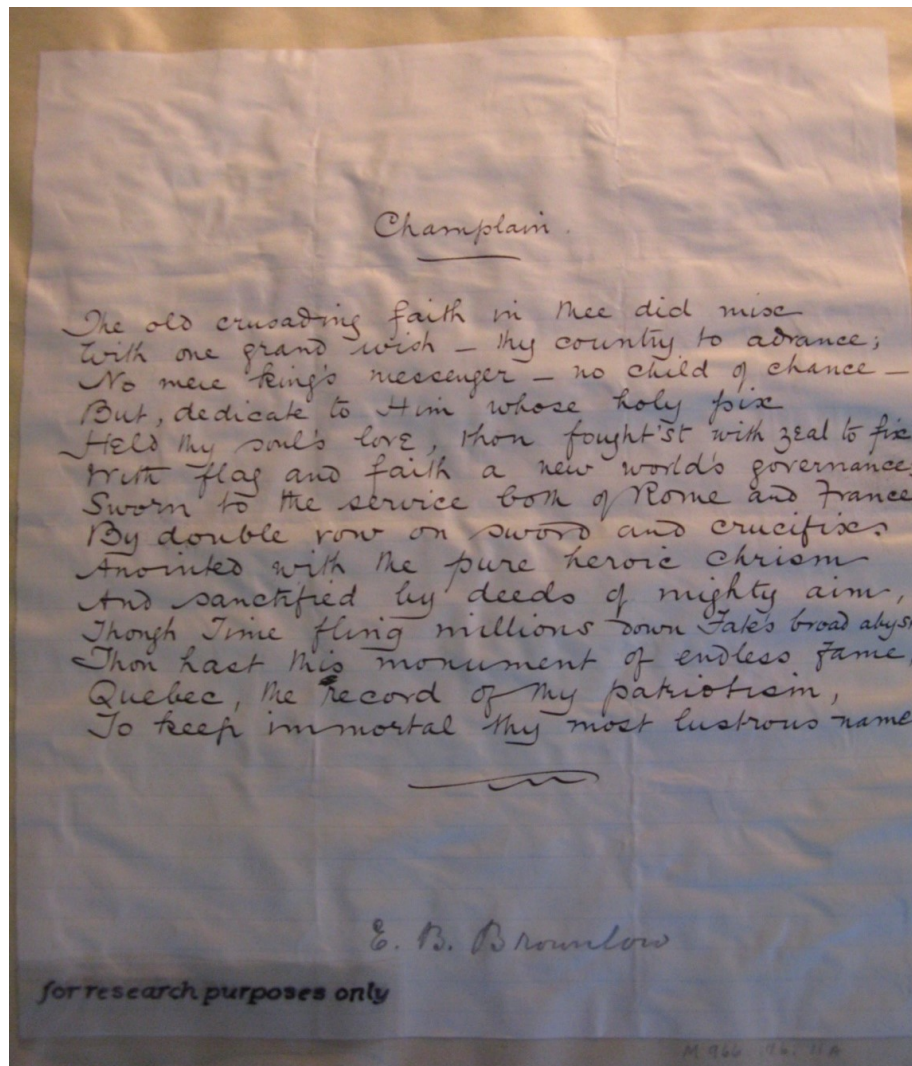


Figure 1: Edward Burrough Brownlow’s sonnet “Champlain.”

At the same meeting, fellow Club member Norman T. Rielle submitted an essay contrasting Samuel de Champlain and Sir Henry Morton Stanley. As a historical figure, Rielle argues, “Stanley must be held to be in pitiful contrast to our Canadian Champlain” not only because of the latter’s “sympathy for

the conquered savage” but also, and perhaps most importantly, because “the old hero told us his marvellous story of adventure and conflict in true soldierly fashion.” It is significant that in the same sentence, Rielle appropriates Champlain as a “Canadian” figure, uses a military vocabulary, and makes a reference to storytelling. Rielle’s treatment of Champlain exemplifies the Club’s conviction that literary and artistic treatments of heroic figures help develop the historical narrative necessary to foster a sense of nationalism. Such a treatment is provided by William Hope, another Pen and Pencil member, who submitted a sketch of Champlain as a contribution to the Club’s scrapbook (fig. 2). Hope, who would eventually become Canada’s official war artist during the First World War, depicts Champlain first and foremost as a warrior and a leader of the Hurons. He is calm and imperial in contrast to the Huron frenzy, shunning guerrilla warfare in favour of a more traditional, even gentlemanly “parley.” Champlain walks towards what is presumably an Iroquois chief, holding what is either a gun or a torch, both of which hold highly symbolic value in portraying Champlain as an imperial emissary. Hope has sketched him walking away from the viewer, suggesting that Champlain’s progress is also an expansion of the Empire.



Figure 2: William Hope’s sketch “Champlain.”

The same kind of imperial militarism is evident in the contributions submitted to the Club’s scrapbook at the meeting of October 22, 1892, on the theme of “Columbus.” Frederick George Scott’s sonnet presents

Columbus as one whose “steadfast eye” (fig. 3) allowed him to fulfill a “deed sublime” in seeking “man’s new empire.” Scott would eventually include the sonnet in *My Lattice and Other Poems*, published in 1894, but before doing so he changed the third and fourth lines from “And westward with the stars on midnight sky / thro strong thought travelled ‘gainst the moving world” to “And to his dreams the ever-westering sky / The ensign of a glorious hope unfurled.”³³ The changes made to the sonnet after its submission to the Club reflect the influence of the Pen and Pencil members. The two new lines are stronger, respect the metre without truncating any words, and provide a more apt rhyme for “hurled.” They also stress the almost divine nature of Columbus’s mission. His “glorious hope” for the expansion of the empire, unfurled by the sky, is described as an “ensign” or a flag, which inevitably conjures up notions of imperialism and nationalism. Columbus’s importance as a mythic foundational figure in the narrative of the new world is signalled by the speaker’s conviction that he will “shine through splendours of man’s utmost thought / Down golden eras to the end of time.”

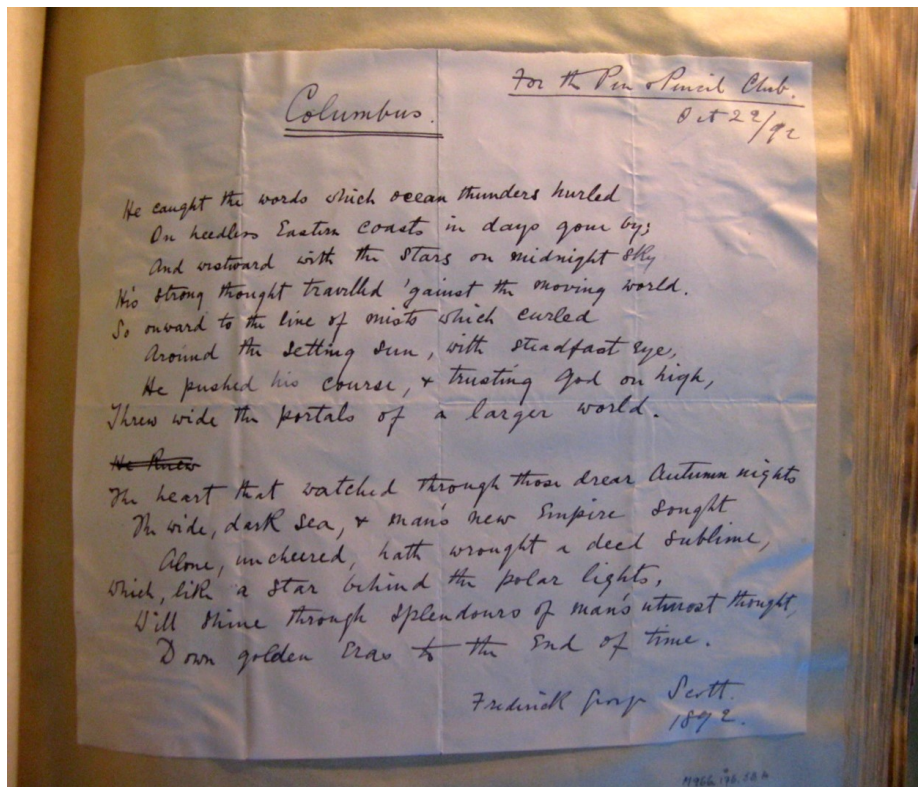


Figure 3: Frederick George Scott's sonnet "Columbus."

In Edmond Dyonnet's watercolour, submitted at the same meeting, we can discern the appropriation of Columbus as a heroic figure for Canadian history (fig. 4). Columbus allegedly used an almanac to predict a lunar eclipse, thereby saving his soldiers from the ire of the Indigenous population in Jamaica, but Dyonnet's painting undeniably associates Columbus with Canada by portraying him as a "coureur des bois" rather than an explorer.



Figure 4: Edmond Dyonnet's watercolour "Columbus."

Surrounded by a setting that should be Caribbean but looks more like a northern forest of evergreens, an impression enhanced by Dyonnet's use of cool colours such as grey and blue, Columbus points to the sky, as if ordering the eclipse of the moon. His action has effectively brought the Indigenous people to their knees, thus foreshadowing the development of relations between Europeans and First Peoples over the next five hundred years. But Columbus's outstretched arm is also pointing to "man's new

Empire.” As the largest representative of the British Empire in America, the Dominion of Canada envisioned by Dyonnet and his fellow Pen and Pencil Club members is one whose foundation is inscribed with imperial virility and courage. The Club members’ idealized and masculine vision of Canadian history was tinged with the same militarism that characterized William Douw Lighthall’s anthology *Songs of the Great Dominion* and the imperialist doctrine more generally. This glorification of militarism and masculinity was sustained by the Club in subsequent years; it is the same sentiment that impelled Andrew Macphail and *The University Magazine* to argue in favour of the creation of a Canadian navy and motivated Stephen Leacock to write in 1909 that Canada must have one, for “the peace or war of Canada is one and the same as the peace and war of Great Britain.”³⁴ It is the same fascination for military glory that ultimately underscored the divide between English- and French-Canadians during the Boer War and during the First World War. For if John Edward Logan and the Pen and Pencil Club were effectively engaged in the ongoing discussion about the relation of history and literature to Canadian nationalism, Henri Bourassa and his growing number of supporters were also beginning to work towards something resembling a French-Canadian nationalism. Two cultures could cohabit one country, or so the Pen and Pencil Club and the political elite believed, but two nations in one country seemed one too many. This ambiguous biculturalism finds its expression both in the Club’s approach towards Francophone members and in the works of several of its members.

From its inception, the Pen and Pencil Club was adamant about the inclusion of French-speaking members. In the first years of its existence, artists and writers such as Paul Lafleur, Edmond Dyonnet, George Couture, and Max Ingres were invited to join and became active and prolific members. During its second meeting in March 1890, the Club extended an invitation to the French-Canadian poet Louis Fréchette. This invitation was certainly not the result of Fréchette’s liberal politics; it was most likely due to his accomplishments as a poet and a playwright. Indeed, in 1880, Fréchette had been awarded one of the Montyon prizes by the Académie Française for *Poésies choisies* and *Les oiseaux de neige: sonnets*, the first award by this institution to a Canadian. By 1890, he had joined the ranks of *La Patrie*, a newspaper owned by Honoré Beaugrand, but had not yet made his more polemical claims concerning education and the clergy. A talented, bilingual

representative of French-Canadian culture who strove to promote the status of writers (he allegedly “took a keen interest in copyright matters, and several times proudly listed himself in the Montreal directory as ‘poet’”), Fréchette was an ideal candidate for the Pen and Pencil Club.³⁵

Inviting Fréchette to join seemed to be an inclusive gesture by which the Club recognized the richness of French-Canadian culture. At the same time, however, there were limitations on Fréchette’s actual participation that reveal a gap between the appearance and reality of the Club’s openness to integration. As André Siegfried wrote in 1906,

Le visiteur du Canada verra souvent, surtout dans les villes, des Anglais et des Français réunis; il les trouvera assis autour des mêmes tables, assistant aux mêmes spectacles, quelquefois aux mêmes clubs et dans les mêmes salons. Désireux de souligner le sens pacifiant de ces rencontres, les Canadiens, anglais ou français, vanteront à l'étranger la parfaite correction de ces rapports; ils citeront volontiers de solides amitiés, nouées entre membres des deux races.... Il ne faudrait pas trop s'abandonner à cet optimisme voulu, qui représente mal la réalité. Toute faute un peu grave ne soulèvera que trop facilement les deux races l'une contre l'autre: leur antipathie réciproque est trop instinctive pour qu'elles puissent jamais arriver à s'entendre tout à fait.³⁶

While the invitation extended to Fréchette may signal an openness towards those elements of French-Canadian society that presented differing political and religious views, the fact that Fréchette only attended one meeting speaks to the underlying values that excluded him.³⁷

A few years later, Club member John Edward Logan wrote a poem entitled “To Louis Fréchette,” which the Club would decide to include in *Verses*. Logan echoes the sentiment of the Club in addressing Fréchette as an “elder brother,” acknowledging not so much their difference in age as the ancestry of French-Canadians who were the first colonizers of the land.³⁸ The sentiment expressed in the poem’s lines seems genuine, but the phrasing suggests an implied elitism: “far above / The bigotry of races or of creeds, / This palm of friendship I extend in love / That sows no discord’s seeds.” The image of two hands uniting above the common “races” and “creeds” underscores one of the beliefs of the Club, that the realm of intellectual and

artistic exchange transcends language or religion. Logan seems to be implying that only those “far above” religious and racial beliefs can unite in mutual understanding—in other words, that the intellectual and cultural elite is the future of the country. Perhaps this rationale also motivated the Club’s election of Henri Bourassa on December 1, 1906, unlikely though this invitation may seem. While Bourassa was elected unanimously, there is no mention in the minutes of either his refusal or his presence at any of the subsequent meetings.

The Club encouraged members to submit works in English or in French, as most of the members were either bilingual or comfortable enough in French that they could understand French prose. Many English-speaking members also chose to submit contributions in French. On several occasions, the subjects proposed for contributions were also given in French, and the members were then free to submit contributions in either language.³⁹ In addition, translations of French works were accepted as contributions. One member, William McLennan, a noted writer and anthologist, often submitted translations of Quebec legends and songs as contributions, thus initiating a wider dissemination of French-Canadian folklore. Because of his propensity for French-Canadian lore, and because he was encouraged by his fellow Pen and Pencil Club members, McLennan became instrumental “not only in preserving but, more important, in rekindling the interest of successive generations of English-Canadian readers in the French-Canadian heritage.”⁴⁰

McLennan’s engagement with French-Canadian folklore, however, is indicative of an attraction to the romanticism of French myths of origin and a strong antimodernist⁴¹ bent rather than a genuine interest in French-Canadian culture. There is, furthermore, a pervasive sense of condescension on the part of Club members towards French-Canadians. Only French-Canadians who worked in English milieux such as McGill University were invited to join. Indeed, the Club recompensed or allowed in its ranks only those French-Canadians who knew how to appreciate their elegant circle. André Siegfried describes this interaction as having a corrupting effect on the French bourgeoisie: “La société anglaise a une puissance extraordinaire d’attraction, nous pourrions presque dire de corruption; elle est si bien persuadée de sa supériorité, elle l’affirme si hautement, comme un fait indiscutable, que personne ne la discute.”⁴² While

this attitude may have coloured the interactions between French- and English-Canadian members, the ideology embraced by the Club itself was nevertheless clear: the development of the arts and the future of the country lay in the “bonne entente” between its two cultures. This ideology finds particularly forceful expression in an article written by Andrew Macphail. In “Why the Conservatives Failed,” Macphail attempts to explain why the Conservative party lost the 1908 federal elections. Lamenting the Conservatives’ decision to support provincial rights against denominational schools on the 1905 Autonomy bills, Macphail states that “no party can expect to succeed in Canada which does not recognize frankly and absolutely that the rights of the French are exactly the same as the rights of the English. There must be no suggestion of concession, because there is nothing to concede. There must be no air of condescension or superiority, because politically all are equal.”⁴³

The members of the Pen and Pencil Club promoted their values through their works. They believed that historical figures were optimal subjects for art and literature and necessary in the development of nationalism, and they maintained a patronizing faith in Canadian biculturalism. The rules of the Club, the values it promoted, and the imperialist ideology that permeates much of the members’ work paint a portrait of a highly elitist club, despite seemingly open-minded or even altruistic intentions. Nevertheless, the Pen and Pencil Club corpus is rich and diverse—indeed its works are too diverse and too numerous to explore in this article. The Pen and Pencil Club fonds, situated in the McCord Museum archives in Montreal, still contains much new information that could contribute to building a more comprehensive portrait of the Pen and Pencil Club and its role in the development of individual Canadian artists and writers, as well as in the development of Canadian culture more generally. The impact of the Club’s ideas on such seminal works as Stephen Leacock’s *Literary Lapses* (1910), *Nonsense Novels* (1911), and *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town* (which were initially presented to the Club and developed as *Sunlight Sketches in Mariposa*) remains to be established. Similarly, Andrew Macphail’s many essays, Edward William Thompson’s short stories, William McLennan’s French-Canadian folk tales, the paintings of William Brymner and Robert Harris, John McCrae’s poetry (produced for the Club and published by Macphail in *The University Magazine*), and the artwork of William Hope and Edmond Dyonnet all benefitted from the “social enjoyment and promotion of the arts and

letters” that drove the Club. These works were the direct or indirect result of the Pen and Pencil Club, having been either commissioned by the Club under one of its mandatory subjects, or having found in the Club their very first audience. The scope and quality of these works thus underscore the value of delving into the long-closed archives of this once so active and dynamic club.

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Notes

¹ “Constitution,” The Pen and Pencil Club Fonds, McCord Museum Library Archives, Montreal, 1890.

² Heather Murray provides a few possible reasons for the decline of clubs, societies, and associations. One of the reasons she invokes is the “decline in women’s participation in accordance with a decreasing availability of domestic servants.” Middle-class women had less time to dedicate to self-improvement because of the labour demands during wartime. However, since several clubs in Montreal were exclusively male, it is more likely that during the First World War, many groups “ceased activities or converted their energies to war ... and did not reconvene once peace was declared.” Heather Murray, *Come, Bright Improvement! The Literary Societies of Nineteenth-Century Ontario* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), 20.

³ Mary Lu MacDonald, *Literature and Society in the Canadas 1817–1850* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen, 1992), 22.

⁴ Robert Darnton, “What is the History of Books?” *Daedalus* 111, no. 3 (1982): 67.

⁵ While the city had always been a centre of exchange and commerce, the 1850s’ sudden influx of immigrants and increase in birth rate, coupled with a rural exodus, caused a massive boom in population. Montreal’s population doubled in the 20 years that spanned the turn of the century, from 217,000 inhabitants in 1891 to 468,000 in 1911. Paul-Andr e Linteau, *Histoire de Montr al depuis la Conf d ration* (Montr al: Bor al, 1992), 89.

⁶ Peter Clark, *British Clubs and Societies 1580–1800: The Origins of an Associational World* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2000), 428.

⁷ MacDonald, *Literature and Society*, 158.

⁸ J. D. Logan and Donald French, *Highways of Canadian Literature* (Toronto: McClelland, 1924), 26.

⁹ D. M. R. Bentley, *The Confederation Group of Canadian Poets, 1880–1897* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 5.

¹⁰ Laurier Lacroix, « L'art au service de "l'utile et du patriotique," » in *La vie culturelle à Montréal vers 1900*, ed. Micheline Cambron (Montreal: Fides, 2005), 60.

¹¹ Carole Gerson, *A Purer Taste: The Writing and Reading of Fiction in English in Nineteenth-Century Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989), 10–11.

¹² April 4, 1914. All dates are references to the minutes of the Pen and Pencil Club meetings, kept in the Club archives.

¹³ Andrew Macphail, "An Essay in Character," in *In Flanders Fields and Other Poems* by John McCrae (Toronto: William Briggs, 1919), 127.

¹⁴ From March 1890 to April 1892, the Club met at the Montreal Racket Club. From October 1892 to April 1894, the Club met in the studio of Club member Professor Couture at 58 University Street. From 1894 to 1910, the Club met in the studio of Edmond Dyonnet at 1207 Bleury Street. When Dyonnet could no longer make his studio available, the Club relocated to the studio of Miss Cleland (an acquaintance of Maurice Cullen) for a year, after which meetings were held in the studio of Club member Kenneth Macpherson at 255 Bleury Street.

¹⁵ In fact, the kind of imperialism embraced by the Pen and Pencil Club dictated its members' traditionalist stance towards women, one based on Victorian separate sphere ideology and undergirded by a firm belief in women as upholders of the social fabric. Parallel to and intertwined with the debate on Canadian autonomy and foreign relations was the debate on women's suffrage and the concept of the New Woman. The Pen and Pencil, whose topics of interest reflected current events and debates both in Canada and in Great Britain, accordingly met on November 30, 1895 under the theme of "The New Woman." Several contributions were made, all of which suggest disdain for the New Woman and for her transgression of the sacrosanct domestic sphere. Members such as Stephen Leacock and Andrew Macphail submitted several essays on the place and role of women as contributions to meetings during the first decade of the century.

¹⁶ Macphail, "Character," 128.

¹⁷ MacDonald, *Literature and Society*, 36.

¹⁸ Leo Cox, *Fifty Years of Brush and Pen: A Historical Sketch of the Pen and Pencil Club of Montreal* (TS Pen and Pencil Club Fonds: McCord Museum Library, Montreal, 1939), 2.

¹⁹ April 13, 1895.

²⁰ March 18, 1899.

²¹ October 14, 1905.

²² Cox, *Fifty Years*, 3.

²³ Stephen Leacock, “Andrew Macphail,” *Queen’s Quarterly* 45 (1938): 447–48.

²⁴ Macphail, “Character,” 128.

²⁵ “Subjective Progress in Arts” was submitted as a contribution for the meeting of February 23, 1907 and was published the same year in *The University Magazine* as “Progress in Art.” “Marriage Festivals in France, England and Canada” was submitted on January 13, 1912 and was published later that year in *The University Magazine* as “Village Life in 3 Countries.”

²⁶ April 4, 1914. This entry most likely refers to William Brymner’s painting “Nude Figure” (1915), kept in the National Gallery of Canada.

²⁷ Clark, *British Clubs*, 13.

²⁸ Mary Vipond, “The Nationalist Network: English Canada’s Intellectuals and Artists in the 1920s,” *Canadian Review of Studies in Nationalism* 7 (1980): 32.

²⁹ G. Spry, “Broadcasting in Canada: A Comment,” *Canadian Historical Review* 46 no. 2 (1965): 137.

³⁰ Ian Ross Robertson, “The Historical Leacock,” in *Stephen Leacock: a Reappraisal*, ed. David Staines (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1986), 44.

³¹ John Edward Logan (Barry Dane), *Verses* (Montreal: The Pen and Pencil Club, 1917), 89–90.

³² Carl Berger, *The Sense of Power: Studies in the Ideas of Canadian Imperialism 1867–1914* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1970), 233.

³³ F. G. Scott, “Columbus,” in *My Lattice and Other Poems* (Toronto: Briggs, 1894), 105.

³⁴ Stephen Leacock, “What Shall we do about the Navy?” *The University Magazine* 10 (1911): 546.

³⁵ Jacques Blais, “Louis Fréchette,” in *Dictionary of Canadian Biography Online*, ed. John English and Réal Belanger (Toronto/Quebec: University of Toronto/Laval University Press), <<http://www.biographi.ca>>.

³⁶ André Siegfried, *Le Canada : Les deux races* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1906), 132–33.

³⁷ The Club also invited Achille Fréchette, Louis’s brother, to attend a meeting as a guest (January 5, 1901).

³⁸ Logan, *Verses*, 68.

³⁹ A few examples of the French subjects include “Un début” (December 27, 1890), “Les demoiselles” (January 16, 1892), “Ennui” (March 18, 1893), “L’argent” (January 10, 1894), “Bambin” (April 7, 1894), and “Coup de grâce” (March 30, 1895).

⁴⁰ Neil K. Besner, “William McLennan,” in *Canadian Writers, 1890–1920*, ed. William H. New. *Dictionary of Literary Biography Vol. 92*. (Detroit: Gale Research, 1990), 245.

⁴¹ See Donald Wright, “W. D. Lighthall and David Ross McCord: Antimodernism and English-Canadian Imperialism, 1880–1918.” *Journal of Canadian Studies* 32, no. 2 (1997): 134–53. Wright gives a good account of the antimodernist fascination with French-Canadian and First Nations culture.

⁴² Siegfried, *Le Canada*, 131.

⁴³ Andrew Macphail, “Why the Conservatives Failed,” *The University Magazine* 7, no. 4 (1908): 545.

APPENDIXES

Table 1. List of Elected Members of the Pen and Pencil Club of Montreal 1890–1914.

March 5, 1890	R. W. Boodle	March 3, 1895	W. Townsend
	William Brymner, C.M.G., R.C.A.	March 10, 1895	Frank Houghton
	J. Try-Davies	January 11, 1896	George Murray
	William Hope, R.C.A.		J. O’Flaherty
	Robert Harris, C.M.G., R.C.A.	January 25, 1896	A. J. Glazebrook
	J. E. Logan	October 31, 1896	Alphonse Jongers, R.C.A.
March 17, 1890	E. B. Brownlow	November 14, 1896	Maurice Cullen, R.C.A.
	Edward Colonna	March 20, 1897	Sir Andrew MacPhail
	S. E. Dawson	January 8, 1898	J. B. Hnace
	O. R. Jacobi, R.C.A.		Karl Boissevain
	Percy F. Woodcock, R.C.A.	January 7, 1899	C. J. Way, R.C.A.
	Prof. Paul Lafleur	April 1, 1899	Prof. F. P. Walton
	William McLennan, N.P.	December 8, 1900	W. Herrick

	Dean Moyse	December 7, 1901	F. W. Hutchison, R.C.A.
	J. C. Pinhey, R.C.A.		Prof. Stephen Leacock
	W. Raphael, R.C.A.	April 12, 1902	J. B. Abbott
	Norman T. Rielle, K.C.	December 13, 1902	C. M. Holt, K.C.
	Forbes Torrance		E. W. Thompson
	Louis Fréchette	November 7, 1903	Prof. J. Macnaughton
April 25, 1890	Sir W. C. Van Horne		Prof. L. M. Gregor
November 15, 1890	Ivan Wotherspoon	March 4, 1905	Lt.-Col. Dr. J. McCrae
January 10, 1891	M. Seymour	November 11, 1905	W. C. Languedoc, K.C.
February 7, 1891	E. Dyonnet, R.C.A.		R. J. Wickenden
January 16, 1892	Henri Julien	December 1, 1906	Prof. P. E. Nobbs, R.C.A.
	K. R. Macpherson, K.C.	April 20, 1907	B. K. Sandwell
	Archdeacon F. G. Scott	October 26, 1907	G. W. Hill, R.C.A.
January 30, 1892	Max Ingres	December 21, 1907	W. S. Maxwell, R.C.A.
	Dr. W. H. Drummond	December 19, 1908	W. F. Chipman, K.C.
March 12, 1892	Joseph Gould		Dr. J. L. Todd
October 8, 1892	Guillaume Couture	October 23, 1909	A. D. Patterson, R.C.A.
November 19, 1892	Prof. John Cox	December 18, 1909	Charles J. Saxe
	C. E. L. Porteous	January 14, 1910	John S. McLennan (Hon. Member)
December 3, 1892	Sir. Wyly Grier, R.C.A., D.C.L.	April 22, 1911	A. H. Robinson, R.C.A.
December 17, 1892	Prof. E. W. Arthy	November 18, 1911	J.E. Hoare
December 10, 1893	F. C. V. Ede	March 9, 1912	G. Horne Russell, R.C.A.

November 24, 1894	Dr. T. J. W. Burgess	November 30, 1912	J. B. Fitzmaurice
	J. McD. Oxley	February 22, 1913	Prof. F.E. Lloyd
		April 5, 1913	W. H. Clapp, A.R.C.A.
		December 26, 1914	Hon. Justice E. F. Surveyer

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