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**David Ross McCord (1844-1930):
Imagining a Self, Imagining a Nation**

Kathryn Nancy Harvey
McGill University, Montreal

A thesis submitted to McGill University in partial fulfillment of the requirements
of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

February 2006



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395 Wellington Street
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ISBN: 978-0-494-25165-2

Our file Notre référence

ISBN: 978-0-494-25165-2

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Canada

Table of Contents

Table of Contents	i
Abstract	ii
Resumé	iii
Acknowledgments	v
List of illustrations	viii
The McCord Family Tree	xii
Time Line	xiii
Chapter One: The Practice of History	1
Chapter Two: Death and Commemoration	51
Chapter Three: The Family Romance	93
Chapter Four: Re/membering Temple Grove	140
Chapter Five: The Way to Dilcoosha	192
Chapter Six: Performing Memories	250
Conclusion: Imagining a Self, Imagining a Nation	287
Appendix I	295
Bibliography	305

Abstract

This thesis is about the life of David McCord and the contribution he made to Canadian public memory as founder of the McCord Museum of National History. In his McGill-sponsored museum, founded in 1921, McCord sought to promote a myth of Canadian origins with narration provided by the objects of his personal collection. Integral to this history was the story of the McCord family, their arrival on this continent and their rise to social prominence. In McCord's version of Canadian history, family and personal myth were conflated with that of nation. Viewed through the prism of his collecting and museum work, McCord's life does not easily fit the Carlylean frame adopted by most biographers. In Canadian biographical writing by historians, the 'truth' about a person's life is revealed by following the modernist recipe of painstakingly recreating a detailed chronology of the individual's life. The approach followed here is an important departure from traditional political biography. Entry into McCord's life does not occur at his biological birth date, but at the moment of his own self-fashioned 'birthing', with the opening of the museum realized near the end of his life. In this biographical strategy, McCord's museum acts as a theatre of memory, where fragments of his life story are reassembled to create a narrative of national origins and of personal redemption. In his selection of objects and their display, and in the creation of an archive and the museum itself, McCord left a very elaborate and lasting record of his response to a set of changes associated with industrialization, a process which, in his lifetime, radically transformed the Montreal of his parents' generation. This thesis traces the connection between the creation of a public museum, founded to promote a collective vision of the Canadian past, and the private world of one collector whose collecting practice was defined as much by his own desire to remember and be remembered as it was by the kinds of objects he collected. What makes David McCord's life and collection so compelling is the opportunity it provides from understanding national history from the intimate perspective of one individual.

Resumé

Cette thèse traite de la vie de David McCord et de sa contribution à la mémoire collective canadienne en tant que fondateur du musée McCord d'histoire canadienne. Dans ce musée fondé en 1921 et parrainé par l'Université McGill, McCord chercha à promouvoir un mythe des origines du Canada dont la narration était faite par les objets de sa collection personnelle. Une partie intégrante de cette histoire était l'histoire de la famille McCord, de son arrivée en Amérique du Nord et de sa percée sociale. Dans la version de David McCord de l'histoire canadienne, le mythe familial et personnel est assimilé au mythe de la nation. Vue à travers le prisme de son travail de collectionneur et de fondateur de musée, la vie de McCord ne s'inscrit pas facilement dans le cadre « Carlylien » que la plupart des biographes adoptent. Dans les écrits biographiques canadiens des historiens, la « vérité » de la vie d'une personne est révélée en suivant la recette moderniste qui consiste à recréer de manière soignée une chronologie détaillée de la vie de cet individu. L'approche utilisée ici se démarque de manière importante de la biographie politique traditionnelle. Nous entrons dans la vie de McCord non pas le jour de sa naissance biologique, mais au moment de son propre « enfantement » par lui-même, quand s'ouvre le musée qu'il mit sur pied presque à la fin de sa vie. Dans cette stratégie biographique, le musée de McCord tient lieu de théâtre de la mémoire, où des fragments de l'histoire de sa vie sont rassemblés pour créer une narration des origines nationales et d'une rédemption personnelle. Par la sélection d'objets et leur exposition, ainsi que par la création d'archives et du musée lui-même, McCord laissa un témoignage minutieux et durable de sa réponse à un ensemble de changements associés à l'industrialisation, un processus qui, dans le courant de sa vie, transforma de manière radicale le Montréal de la génération de ses parents. Ce qui rend l'histoire de la vie et de l'œuvre de David McCord si intéressante, c'est l'occasion qu'elle présente d'explorer cette intersection, rarement étudiée en histoire canadienne, entre l'individu et la nation. Cette thèse décrit la relation entre la création d'un musée public, fondé pour promouvoir une vision collective du passé canadien, et

le monde privé d'un collectionneur, dont la contribution fut définie autant par son propre désir de se souvenir et de s'inscrire dans la mémoire des autres que par les types d'objets qu'il collectionna.

Acknowledgments

When I first began this project, I thought becoming an historian meant spending long hours alone in an archive, walled off from the world by a stack of bankers' boxes. Now that I have reached the end of this process I have come to realize that I was always surrounded by a small army of well-wishers and people who made it possible, enjoyable even, for me to sit with myself and 'think big thoughts'.

Thank you so much.

The FCAR, the SSHRC, the Montreal History Group, the McGill Class of '66', all provided financial support.

Suzanne Morin and Pam Miller, former archivists at the McCord Museum, Victoria Dickenson, Conrad Graham, Nora Hague, Moira McCaffrey of the McCord Museum, Lyne Champagne, archivist at the City of Westmount, H  l  ne Charbonneau archivist, the City of Montreal, Judith Berliner archivist, Ch  teau de Ramezay Museum, the workers at the Archives nationales (Esplanade).

Catherine Desbarats, for encouraging me to uncoil my tightly coiled prose. Brian Lewis for his support. A very special thanks to Sherry Olson who got very little out of this except the pleasure of seeing me 'get my union card'. Brian Young, for sharing his version of the McCord family story with me. Nancy Partner, for introducing me to Aristotle and for challenging me to do something more than simply "  pater la bourgeoisie" with my story of David Ross McCord's life. Faith Wallis, for showing me by her example that history is indeed a ludic practice. Mary McDaid (formerly of the McGill history department) and Colleen Parish from the McGill history department, for making it a more human place. Jarrett Rudy, for being a buddy. Don Fyson, for sharing his expertise on nineteenth-century legal history in addition to material on the McCords, and for encouraging me to visit the archives of the McCord Museum, in the first place.

Sandra Langley, for setting me on this course with her post-colonial reading of the 1992 McCord exhibit. Martha Langford, for sharing her thoughts and material with me on David McCord.

Bettina Bradbury, for her mentorship and for her ongoing support, without which this thesis would have not gotten done. A special thanks to Alice Nash who contributed to this thesis in so many ways it would take at least a page to describe them. Don Wright, for being the best kind of colleague. Karen Dubinsky, for teaching me about 'ruth' and ruthlessness. Wendy Ayotte, for teaching me about forgiveness. Rose Holtz, my soul sister in history, although we only met in the flesh once you taught me that history is truly an art, the art of living well.

Carol Tenebrink for being my writing coach and for sharing Soup Harbour with me. Vida Simon and Jack Stanley, for sharing their books and their thoughts. Bruce Russell, for sharing his knowledge of 19th century Anglicanism and material culture. Brian Deer, for sharing his knowledge of wampum, and for showing me how little I know about Native history.

Sara Binder, Janet Cleveland, Michèle Dagenais, Lorna Roth, and Raphael Fischler, for close readings of my texts. Janet Cleveland and Doreen Lothian, for talking psychology with me. Craig Desson, Karen Fernandes, and Sujatha Dey, for help with illustrations.

I thank the universe for making Shauna Beharry my neighbour. Talking with her about some of the ideas in this thesis was always a source of inspiration. Susan Bronson and Pilote for walks and talks on the Mountain. Ian McKay for listening to me once, and in such a way, that I knew I had something worth saying about David Ross McCord. Judith Castle for her wonderful insights at the beginning.

Much of this process felt like recovery from a long illness. For help with my symptoms many thanks to my guardian angels: Donna Berry, Patrick Callahan, Christine Péricart, Ghissa Israel, Jill Johnson, Jeanne Pelissier, Suzanne Perron, and Joan Ruvinsky. A special thanks to Myokyo of Le Centre Zen de la Main, Shusheila of Integral Yoga, Joanne Ransom of Yoga on the Park, and the women of Sound and Movement.

Gordon Ward Harvey for teaching me to love reading. Agnes Kettles Harvey for teaching me how to make things fit. Garth Harvey and Alison Harvey Ransom for their unfailing encouragement.

Claire Chouinard, for being a 'true' clown *à deux*. Nélia Tavares for lessons in love. A special thanks to Janet Cleveland, who always offered help when help was needed. Raphael Fischler for his friendship and the special gift of the ocean. Dina Saikali for being my writing and wandering buddy. To have such a friend is to be truly blessed.

Kaz Amaranth for being my witness.

Illustrations

All images, except those produced by the author, Kathryn Harvey, have been reproduced with permission from the McCord Museum of Canadian History, Montreal.

The McCord Family Tree, Pam Miller et al., *The McCord Family A Passionate Vision*, (Montreal: 1992), p. 25. xii

Chapter One: The Practice of History

Figure 1, Collage of David Ross McCord by Kathryn Harvey, 2002. 1

Chapter Two: Death and Commemoration

Figure 1, McCord Monument, Mount Royal Cemetery, tomb with shadow by Kathryn Harvey, 1999. 51

Chapter Three: The Family Romance

Figure 1, John Davidson, David Ross, and Robert Arthur McCord, (MP488.2), McCord Museum of Canadian History 93

Figure 2, McCord Family Album frontpiece, (McFa N060.2-3), McCord Museum of Canadian History, Montreal 106

Figure 3, untitled sketch by David Ross McCord, (M989x.161.5), McCord Museum of Canadian History, Montreal. 118

Figure 4, Seminary of St. Sulpice, Mtl. by Bunnett, (M650), McCord Museum of Canadian History, Montreal. 119

Figure 5, The Grange, Thomas McCord's house, Montreal, Henderson album, 1872, (MP 000033.6), McCord Museum of Canadian History. 126

Chapter Four: Re/membering Temple Grove

Figure 1, 'Plan de la propriété de la succession de feu L'Honorable J.S. McCord', 1866 drawing by F.I.V. Regnaud, McCord Museum of Canadian History, Montreal 140

Figure 2, Summer house at "Temple Grove", 1872, (MP-33.5), McCord Museum of Canadian History, Montreal 189

Figure 3, David Ross McCord's house "Temple Grove," Cote-des-Neiges, Montreal, 1872, by Henderson, (MP 0000.33.1), McCord Museum of Canadian History, Montreal 188

Figure 4, Westerly view from the garden of annuals, "Temple Grove", 1872, by Henderson, (MP 0000.33.2), McCord Museum of Canadian History, Montreal 189

- Figure 5, Croquet Lawn at “Temple Grove”, Cote-des-Neiges, 1872, by Henderson, (MP-33.3), McCord Museum of Canadian History, Montreal 189
- Figure 6, Bridge and harbour at “Temple Grove”, Cote-des-Neiges, 1872, by Henderson, (MP-33.4), McCord Museum of Canadian History, Montreal 190
- Figure 7, Temple Grove interior suit of armour, McCord Museum of Canadian History (MP-2135.2N), Museum of Canadian History, Montreal 191
- Figure 8, Artifacts and artwork inside “Temple Grove”, Montreal, ca 1916, (MP-2135.4), McCord Museum of Canadian History, Montreal 191
- Figure 9, Montreal from the St. Lawrence, engraving by unknown artist but thought to be Bartlett (M333), McCord Museum of Canadian History, Montreal 181
- Figure 10, David Ross McCord in his library, “Temple Grove”, Montreal, ca 1916 (MP-2135-1N), McCord Museum of Canadian History, Montreal 187

Chapter Five: The Way to ‘Dilcoosha’

- Figure 1, Joseph House, (MP180), McCord Museum of Canadian History, Montreal 192

Chapter Six: Performing Memories

Objects are footnoted in the text with full ethnological indications from McCord Museum, Montreal

Aboriginal Room

- Figure 1, Ethnology display cases, McCord National museum, Joseph House, photo, ca 1927 (MP181.2A) McCord Museum of Canadian History, Montreal (interior of Indian Room, McCord Museum of Canadian History, Montreal) 260
- Figure 2, Carving of a Narwhal, 1875-1900, Nunavimiut, ivory, animal fat (M278), McCord Museum of Canadian History, Montreal 260
- Figure 3, Ornament, Abenaki, maker unknown, 18th or 19th century, glass and stone beads, fibre, (M33), McCord Museum of Canadian History, Montreal 261
- Figure 4, Cradleboard, Iroquois, maker unknown, ca 1810, wood, paint, metal, leather (M187), McCord Museum of Canadian History, Montreal 263
- Figure 5, Cradleboard wrapper, Iroquois, maker unknown, 1825-1875, wool, silk, cotton, silver, glass beads (M208), McCord Museum of Canadian History, Montreal 263

Figure 6, Headdress, Iroquois(?), maker unknown, 1775-1800, deer head skin with antlers, hide and thongs, porcupine quills, eagle and owl feathers, down stroud, sinew, red ochre (M182), McCord Museum of Canadian History, Montreal 264

Figures 7. and 8, Armlet and gorget, Maliseet, maker unknown, 19th century, birchbark, spruce root, velvet, glass and metal beads, cotton thread (M196, M197), McCord Museum of Canadian History, Montreal 266

Figures 9. and 10. Headdress, Mi'kmaq, maker unknown, ca 1860, turkey feather, wool, cotton, copper wrap, (M92), Shoes – unknown (M93) McCord Museum of Canadian History, Montreal 266

Figure 11, Mi'kmaq war dance with costumes from 1860, photo, photographed in 1914 (MP-2027.2), McCord Museum of Canadian History, Montreal 267

Figure 12, Container, Mi'kmaq, maker unknown, birchbark, fibre, porcupine quills, glass beads, dyes, (M188), McCord Museum of Canadian History, Montreal 267

Figure 13, Wampum belt, Iroquois, maker unknown, late 18th century, shell: northern quahog, knobbed whelk, deer hide and red ochre, (M1904), McCord Museum of Canadian History, Montreal 267

Figure 14, Wolfe Room, McCord Museum, Joseph House, ca 1927, photo (MP181.3), McCord Museum of Canadian History, Montreal 269

Figure 15, McCord Museum, Joseph House, ca 1927 photo (MP181.4), McCord Museum of Canadian History, Montreal 269

McCord Room

Figure 16, Thomas McCord by Louis Dulongpré (M8354), McCord Museum of Canadian History, Montreal 270

Figure 17, Dulcimer, “Aeolian Harp belonging to Judge John Samuel McCord” (M16072), McCord Museum of Canadian History, Montreal 271

Figure 18, Trillium picture, “Wildflowers, by Anne Ross McCord”, drawing (M828.1), McCord Museum of Canadian History, Montreal 271

Figure 19, Bartlett engraving, (M333) 271

Protestant and Catholic Spiritual Pioneers

Figure 20, The Right Rev. Edward Feild, photo (P228), McCord Museum of Canadian History, Montreal 272

Figure 21, Mason's hammer, maker unknown, ca 1825 (M1217), McCord Museum of Canadian History, Montreal 274

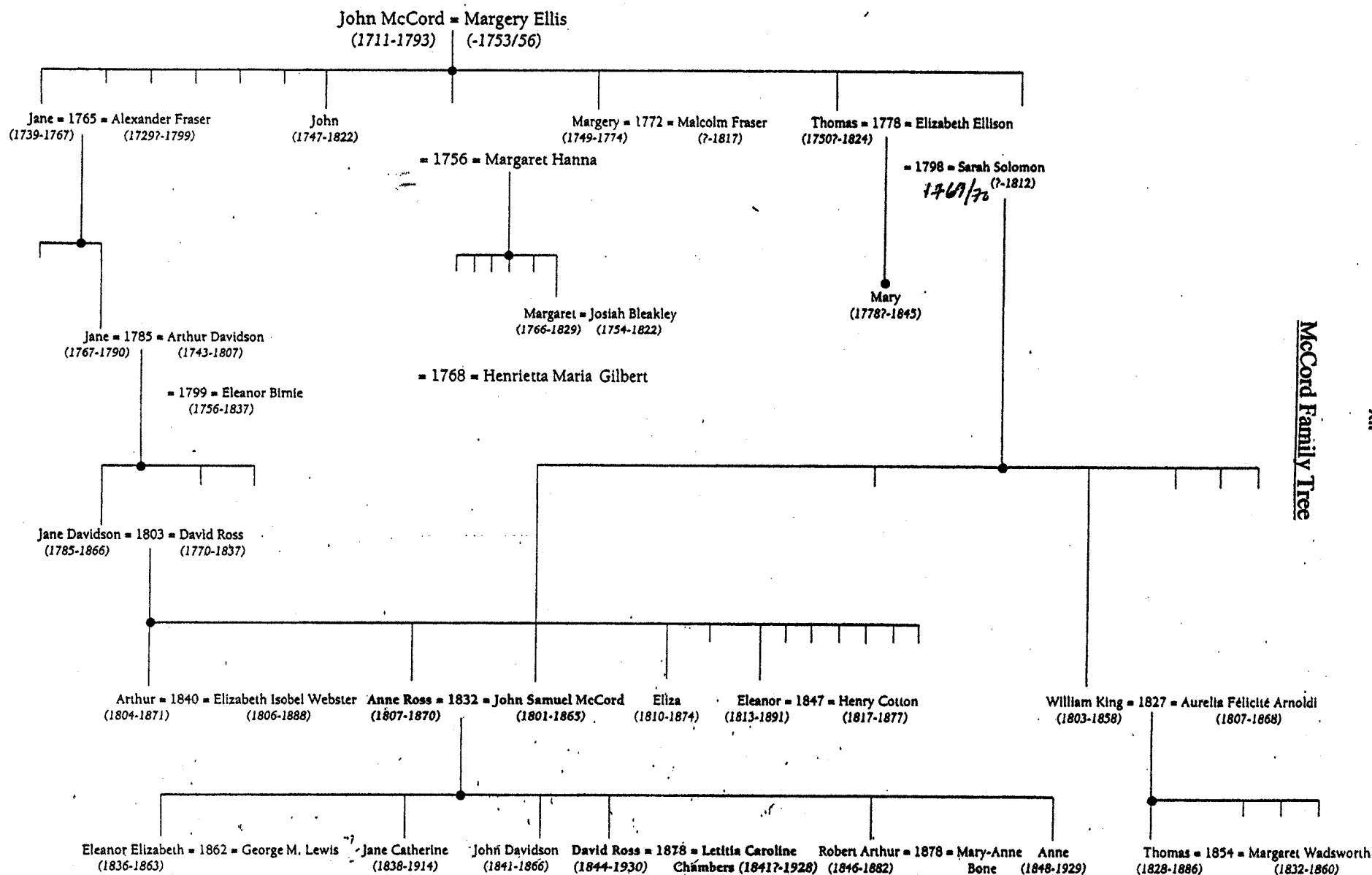
Figure 22, New Roman Catholic Church, consecrated July 1829 (M715), McCord Museum of Canadian History, Montreal 274

Figure 23, The Calvary, Two Mountains, Quebec by Bunnett (M738), McCord Museum of Canadian History, Montreal 275

Conclusion

Figure 1, untitled, David Ross McCord (M994x.5.213.8), McCord Museum of Canadian History, Montreal 287

LA FAMILLE McCORD • THE McCORD FAMILY



From *The McCord Family: A Passionate Vision*, ed. Pam Miller et al., (Montreal: McCord Museum, 1992), p. 25.

DAVID ROSS MCCORD CHRONOLOGY
1844-1930

- | | | |
|---|---|--|
| <p><u>10-1-44</u> Anne (mother) elected secretary of Protestant Orphan Asylum at annual meeting</p> <p><u>18-3-44</u> David Ross McCord (DRM) born St. James Street</p> <p><u>20-3-44</u> DRM baptized at Christ Church by Dr. Bethune</p> <p><u>Spring 1844</u> DRM moves with family to Temple Grove, former summer home, now permanent residence of McCord family on Côte-des-Neiges Road</p> <p><u>24-5-46</u> birth of brother Robert Arthur</p> <p><u>19-9-48</u> John Samuel McCord (JSM) takes John and David to see the alphabet Dioramas of winter</p> <p><u>20-10-48</u> Birth of sister Annie</p> <p><u>1848-49</u> Planning and building of gardens at Temple Grove</p> <p><u>10-1-49</u> JSM elected pres. of Horticultural Society</p> <p><u>1-12-50</u> all children affected with measles,</p> | <p>eldest son John has hearing permanently impaired</p> <p><u>18-10-50</u> JSM judge of minerals in Industrial Exhibition along with William Logan and Dr. Holmes</p> <p><u>1851</u> JSM begins to suffer from severe tic and other ailments causing him much pain</p> <p><u>19-9-52</u> JSM invited guest at celebrations of opening of St. Lawrence and Atlantic Railway</p> <p><u>1853</u> JSM a known collector of Canadiana</p> <p><u>May 1853</u> DRM begins school at Lower Canada College</p> <p><u>30-6-53</u> DRM accompanies father on Stanstead court circuit</p> <p><u>1854</u> JSM president of Mount Royal Cemetery Co. - Cemetery opening 15-6-54</p> <p><u>1854</u> JSM made vice-chancellor of Bishop's University</p> <p><u>19-12-54</u> "David from obstinate refusal to put his hood on froze his face" JSM</p> | <p><u>27-12-54</u> DRM wins prize for map 'Seat of War' at Lower Canada College</p> <p><u>7-3-55</u> Eldest sister Eleanor 'received' at Gov. Gen. ball</p> <p><u>18-3-55</u> "My dear David's birthday, at 11 a fine intelligent good boy clever and bright; his only fault a little too much of the McCord pepper, but that will wear off with care and correction." JSM</p> <p><u>June 1855</u> DRM wins prizes in classics, geography, history, mapping at Lower Canada College</p> <p><u>12-11-56</u> JSM attends celebrations of Grand Trunk</p> <p><u>9-12-56</u> Christ Church Cathedral burns down</p> <p><u>14-9-57</u> DRM accompanies father to see 1st tube installed in Victoria Bridge</p> <p><u>25-8-58</u> DRM visits Ottawa with father, meets Dr. Edward Van Cortlandt, (who opened private</p> |
|---|---|--|

museum of
archeology/geology)

20-10-58 JSM's only
brother William King
McCord, dies.

Nov. 1859 JSM invited
guest to opening of
Victoria Bridge

18-2-60 JSM elected
to council of Art
Assoc. of Mtl.

Aug. 1860 Visit of
Prince of Wales,
inauguration of Crystal
Palace and Victoria
Bridge. Family goes to
Christ Church to see P.
of Wales, JSM makes
address to P. of Wales
at Bishop's College

30-3-61 DRM
celebrates 1st
communion

24-4-62 Eldest sister
Eleanor marries
George M. Lewis

5-6-62 DRM
accompanies father to
Waterloo courts for
"botanical excursion"

22-6-62 DRM
accompanies father to
Bishop's College
convocation

21-9-63 Eleanor is
buried in Mount Royal

Cemetery. (Born 14-8-38)

Spring 1863 DRM graduates
with B.A. from McGill
University

Apr. 1864 Eldest brother John
becomes medical doctor

26-9-64 DRM gives paper 'On
Canadian ferns, their varieties
and habitats' before the
Montreal Natural History
Society (JSM one of the
founding members)

5-12-64 Brevet of cléricature
with legal firm of Leblanc,
Cassidy, Leblanc Mtl.
(Leblanc old friend of JSM)
Accepted to the Bar of Lower
Canada

1-2-65 DRM becomes
member of Natural History
Society

4-5-65 Robert receives
commission in British army

1-7-65 Father John Samuel
McCord buried (born 18-6-01)

March 1866 Grandmother
Jane Davidson Ross dies

Apr. 1866 Robert Tylee,
husband of Mary Ann Ross
(aunt), dies,

10-6-66 Brother John dies,
(b.1841), after year-long
illness

30-5-67 DRM
graduates from McGill
U with B.C.L. and
Masters of Arts

1870 Mother-Anne
Ross dies (b.21-5-07)

21-9-70 DRM
commissioned as
ensign, No. 1 Colonial
Reserve militia,
Montreal West
Regiment.

Nov. 1870 Youngest
brother Robert
contacts typhoid in
Ireland while lieut. in
British Army

1871 Uncle Arthur
Ross dies (b.1804)

10-6-71 DRM made
lieutenant, no.1 Co.
same as above

Oct. 1871 DRM joins
the Masons

21-1-73 DRM visits
Key West on way to
Havana

1874 Aunt Eliza Ross
dies (b.1810)

1874-1883 DRM
becomes alderman for
the City of Montreal
representing Centre
Ward

1874-78 DRM becomes chairman of the health committee, president and one of the founders of the Protestant Small Pox Hospital. It is here that he meets his future wife Letitia Chambers who is the matron.

1876 DRM made Commissioner to Manitoba

1877 Henry Cotton dies, (b.1817) husband of aunt Eleanor Ross

Spring 1877 DRM travels to England on family business to take care of brother Robert

26-1-78 Brother Robert marries Mary Anne Bone, in England

1878 DRM engaged to marry Letitia Chambers who moves to Toronto to learn deportment

12-4-78 DRM delegate to Synod for St. Matthew's Parish

Aug. 1878 DRM marries Letitia Chambers in Toronto, returns with bride to Temple Grove, sisters move to Westmount

1880-82 Robert sues brother David for his share of family inheritance

9-9-82 DRM and Robert reach out of court settlement for Robert's portion of family inheritance

7-11-82 Brother Robert dies, buried in Mount Royal Cemetery (b.25-5-46)

1890 DRM adopted by Six Nations Council at Brantford and given Mohawk name Rononshonni (the builder)

Summer 1895 DRM makes trip to Western Europe (France, Italy, Switzerland) with wife Letitia

1895 DRM named Kings Council

30-12-99 DRM writes letter to Gov. General Minto suggesting that DRM participate in the writing of a new constitution for South Africa

1901 Letitia Chambers McCord publishes her poems celebrating the British Empire in J. Douglas Borthwick's anthology

21-10-03 DRM writes Prime Minister Laurier offering his collection as basis for Canadian history museum in Ottawa bearing DRM's name

15-8-05 DRM applies for the Beit professorship in colonial history at Oxford

1906 DRM approaches American philanthropist Andrew Carnegie for money to build a Greek Temple adjacent to the McCord residence, for a museum of Canadian history

1908-09 DRM approaches the City of Westmount with plan to build a Greek Temple next to library in Westmount Park, to house history museum

1909-1919 DRM tries to donate collection to McGill University but University's board of governors refuses DRM's conditions

1912 DRM becomes member of G.E. Cartier Committee - statue to commemorate Father of Confed

1912-1915 DRM tries to interest the Natural History Society in conjunction with the Mechanics Institute, and the Château de Ramezay Museum, in his plan to build a museum of Canadian history

1914 Sister Jane Catherine, dies (b.18-5-38)

1916 DRM drapes Temple Grove in black for funeral of Edward VII and has it photographed

1919 DRM donates collection to McGill University

1919 DRM leaves Christ Church over controversy with Rev. Dr. Symonds over sermon on Immaculate Conception (DRM member since birth)

13-10-21 McCord Museum of National History opens

1921 DRM receives honorary doctorate from McGill

29-6-22 Anne McCord makes demand for interdictment of brother David

14-8-22 DRM attempts to murder his wife

16-9-22 DRM admitted as patient to the Protestant Hospital for the Insane

1923 DRM resigns from the Bar, letter written by WD Lighthall

Sept. 1923 DRM admitted to Homewood Sanitorium, Guelph, Ontario

15-7-28 Letitia Chambers McCord dies at Montreal Homeopathic Hospital

8-29 Temple Grove is put up for sale

1929 Sister Anne McCord dies (b. 20-10-48)

12-4-30 David Ross McCord dies at Homewood Sanitarium, Guelph, Ontario

14-4-30 DRM buried Mount Royal Cemetery

Chapter One: The Practice of History

[T]he Artist's role is to demolish the deceptive image of history as an abstraction (as an ideological and/or statistical, administrative picture in which death becomes invisible) by bearing witness to the body.¹

- Shoshana Felman

Things, events, that occupy space yet come to an end when someone dies may make us stop in wonder – and yet one thing, or an infinite number of things, dies with every man's or woman's death, unless the universe itself has a memory.²

- Jorge Luis Borges

Nothing reveals us as clearly as our attempt to shape the past. Retrospection, by definition, is reflexive.³

- Mark Slouka



Figure 1, Collage of David Ross McCord by Kathryn Harvey, 2002

¹ Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, *Testimony. Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and Theory* (New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 108.

² Jorge Luis Borges, "The Witness," in *The Aleph and Other Stories* (New York: Penguin Books, 2004), p. 161.

³ Mark Slouka, "Arrow and Wound: The Art of Almost Dying," *Harper's*, May 2003, p.40.

“David Ross McCord (1844-1930): Imagining a Self, Imagining a Nation” is about the life of David Ross McCord and the contribution he made to Canadian public memory as founder of the McCord National Museum. A lawyer by profession and member of one of the most prominent legal families in the country, he considered his true vocation to be that of collector. During much of his adult life, and using what remained of his family’s fortune, David McCord went about accumulating and documenting objects he felt were crucial to the study and preservation of Canadian history as he understood it. His collection of Native artifacts and Wolfeiana was one of the largest of its kind.

A visionary in the field of Canadian history, David McCord mounted a collection which formed the first comprehensive record of the country’s material past. With foresight, he constructed a narrative of Canadian history which included First Nations people. It would take Canadian historians another half century to catch up with him.⁴ There were others who shared his fascination for things Native and for the military hardware associated with empire building; but what set him apart was his desire to create a collection that would encompass Canadian history from Native/European contact to Confederation. McCord’s dream of creating a Canadian version of the South Kensington Museum or the Smithsonian Institute outstripped his resources.⁵ He did manage however to provide future generations with traces of a material past that might otherwise have been lost.

Canada was a new nation at the turn of the twentieth century. McCord believed that for Canada to survive, the Canadian people would need to cultivate

⁴ Among McCord’s contemporaries I could find none who began their histories of Canada with First Nations. A popular place to begin was with New France, but this was a distant second to ‘voyages of discovery’, the most common point of departure. See Thomas Chapais, *Cours d’histoire du Canada, Tome I, 1760-1791* (Québec: J.P. Garneau, 1919), C.W. Colby, *The Old Régime, 1608-1698* (New York: Henry Holt, 1908), F.X. Garneau, *Histoire du Canada depuis sa découverte jusqu’à nos jours* (Montréal: Beauchemin & Valois, 1881), William Kingsford, *The History of Canada: From the first known voyages to the death of Champlain Vol. I* (Toronto: Rowsell & Hutchison, 1887), John McMullen, *The History of Canada From its First Discovery to the Present Time Vol. I* (Brockville: McMullen & Co., 1891), and Carl Wittke, *A History of Canada: Discovery and Exploration* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1935).

⁵ MCFP, file #2055, DRM to Right Hon. Sir Robert Borden. He writes: “The whole thing is on a level with the Bodleian.” No date.

their own distinct identity. He saw his contribution as providing the symbols and the raw materials from which this identity would be created. The motto for the museum, "When there is no vision the people will perish," a sentence taken from the Old Testament, spoke to David McCord's fear of the dissolution of his young country under the fragmenting forces of French-Canadian nationalism, regionalism, and American cultural and economic domination.⁶ The words also gave voice to a more private fear of destruction, posed by his family's history of alcohol abuse, impotence, and premature death. Knowledge of Canada's past was McCord's bulwark against threats to Canada's, and his own, existence. With no heirs to carry on the McCord name, the museum became his means for ensuring familial continuity in the face of death. To this end, McCord worked to assemble under one roof as many artifacts from Canada's past as his resources permitted. In 1921, his dream of finding a home for his collection, where it could be put on permanent public display, finally came true with the opening of the McCord Museum of National History on the McGill University campus.

Much of the passion fuelling McCord's vision of Canada came from a strong filial attachment to the memory of his father as well as from a fascination with those of his ancestors who best personified the heroic and whom he cast in the central role of builders and defenders of the fledgling Canadian nation. What drove McCord, and what unquestionably became an obsession in the last twenty years of his life, was a desire to bequeath his country a romantic myth of origins, with narration provided by the objects in his personal collection. Integral to that history was the story of the McCord family, their arrival in Quebec following the British victory on the Plains of Abraham and their subsequent rise to social prominence in the first decades of the nineteenth century. In McCord's version of Canadian history, family and personal myth were conflated with that of nation. The McCord Museum acted as David McCord's theatre of memory, where fragments of his life story were reassembled to create a narrative of national origins and personal redemption.

In leaving behind a collection of nineteenth-century Canadian material

⁶ Proverbs 13:18, *Bible*, King James Version (Cleveland: The World Publishing Company, no

culture, McCord also left a deeply personal record of one man's experience of life in Canada's largest city at a time of unprecedented change. Seen through the prism of his collecting and museum work, McCord's life provides a view of a time and a place which no longer exist except in written vestiges and material traces. What makes the man and his life work so compelling a study, however, is the opportunity they provide for exploring that rarely visited intersection in Canadian history between self and nation. The thesis that follows traces the connection between a public museum founded to promote a collective vision of the Canadian past and the private world of a man whose collecting practice was defined as much by his desire to remember and be remembered as by the objects he collected.

II

David Ross McCord died in 1930, almost three decades before my birth. Yet over the past ten years, I have spent more time with his memory than with those I am most intimate with. It feels strange that someone who has occupied as much space in my thoughts as a lover has no physical presence in my life. I know what he looked like from photographs. What he sounded or smelled like – information I would possess if we were truly intimate – is beyond knowing. One reporter described him as speaking with an English accent, but was it the accent of an Oxford don or of a London lawyer? People described him as being an accomplished raconteur, but did he possess a storyteller's range, employing one voice and then another, and another? Did he look people in the eye when he talked, or away? Did his hands hang limply by his sides, or did he use them to punctuate his sentences? If we want to know who the man was, shouldn't we experience him with all our senses, including our sense of smell? The memory of odors persists the longest. Yet smell must be one of the most underutilized categories in history. Was he a smoker as well as a drinker? When he left the St. James Club late on a Friday afternoon, was the scent of whisky on his breath?

I begin this section with a reflection on how I know David Ross McCord.

date).

If he were before me, the answer would be obvious: I would recognize him by relying on my senses and my memory. In the absence of first-hand knowledge, professional historians substitute carefully constructed narratives gleaned from archival sources. The problem I face in writing about McCord's life is how to bring together historical narrative and individual memory. McCord's history, the one he created for his museum, was interwoven with personal memories. The objects collected by him and later displayed at the McCord Museum were intended as mnemonic devices for their owner and for visitors to the museum. My knowledge of McCord comes from the memories he left behind in the form of letters, historical notebooks, and in the collection he amassed. Another layer of memory that informs this thesis is my own, the memories evoked in me by being a witness to McCord's transmission of the past.

Academic history makes a clear distinction between historical narrative and collective or individual memories. "Popular memory is on the face of it the very antithesis of written history," writes Raphael Samuels.⁷ James Young, writing about Holocaust historiography and the eyewitness, points to a possible fruitful middle ground between history and memory. "...[the] integration of both the historian's and the survivor's voices into Holocaust historiography suggests the basis of an uncanny kind of history-telling in its own right: an anti-redemptory narrative that works through, yet never actually bridges, the gap between a survivor's 'deep memory' and historical narrative."⁸ In similar fashion, this thesis attempts to address the gap between McCord's memories and written history by acknowledging the importance of memory, both McCord's and my own, in the creation of historical narratives.

It was McCord's collecting practice which first suggested this approach to me. His example reminds us that history is not just enacted in the mind but also in the body, and retained in bodily memory. The collecting McCord pursued with such a passion was a process of embodiment, making meaning from the past through the careful gathering and ordering of objects. Collecting only made sense

⁷ Raphael Samuel, *Theatres of Memory* (London: Verso, 1994), p. 6.

through the senses. It was McCord's physical presence that *made his history go*, to borrow a term from Della Pollack.⁹ McCord made history by physically grouping together objects. He collected what touched him both literally and figuratively: what he could put his hands on as well as what moved and amused him, the things he loved. "It ought to be obvious," writes Jean Baudrillard, "that the objects that occupy our daily lives are in fact the objects of a passion, that of personal possession whose quotient of invested affect is in no way inferior to that of any other variety of human passion. Indeed, this everyday passion often outstrips all the others, and sometimes reigns supreme in the absence of any rival."¹⁰ For McCord, the past was present not in words but in things, objects from his everyday life that still bore traces of past performances.

Historians have traditionally favoured the sense of sight. "Seeing is the origin of knowing," writes Joan Scott: "Knowledge is gained through vision; vision is a direct, unmediated apprehension of a world of transparent objects."¹¹ We are told that veracity is present in eyewitness accounts, and historians are referred to as 'observers' of past events. As professional historians, we are entreated to 'look but do not touch'. We examine, we do not caress. When we do touch, it is often not to feel. Collecting, on the other hand, calls upon all the senses but is especially dependent on the senses of touch and sight. Just as there are different ways to learn, there are also different ways to know. What would the histories we create look like if touch was considered as important as sight? French philosopher Emmanuel Lévinas asserts that touch moves us closer while sight creates distance. He writes, "...proximity, which should be the signification of the sensible, does not belong to the movement of cognition.... Sight, by reason of its distance and its totalizing embrace, imitates or prefigures the 'impartiality' of the intellect and its refusal to hold to what the immediacy of the sensible would

8 James Young, "Between History and Memory: The Voice of the Eyewitness," *Witness and Memory: The Discourse of Trauma*, ed. Ana Douglass and Thomas Vogler (New York and London: Routledge, 2003), p. 276.

⁹ Della Pollack, "Introduction: Making History Go," *Exceptional Spaces: Essays in Performance & History*, ed. Della Pollock (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1998).

¹⁰ Jean Baudrillard, "The System of Collecting," *The Cultures of Collecting*, ed. John Elsner and Roger Cardinal (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1994), p. 7.

dispose, or what it would constitute.”¹² There is more than one kind of touch, to be sure. Touch can heal but it can also do great harm, as we shall see.

Everything I know about McCord is literally second-hand. My knowledge of him comes from time spent examining letters he wrote, historical notebooks he kept, drawings he made, objects he collected, things he touched. The white cotton gloves I am obliged to wear when carrying out this operation are indicative of the kind of distance historians are expected to adopt towards their subjects. Most protective clothing is worn to preserve the wearer. In the archives, the reverse is true. It is the historian’s physical presence/present that carries the threat of contamination. Bodily residues and rough handling (the gloves actually increase this risk) do eventually destroy old documents. What is at stake is not just good archival practice but how professional historians go about making history.

The history I was taught in graduate school and during my apprenticeship with the Montreal History Group at McGill University was firmly rooted in the archives. Educated to read and interpret written documents and place them in their ‘proper’ context, I followed a trajectory laid down by generations of university-educated historians convinced that the truth about the past was to be found in documents collected in archives. When history was first introduced into the university curriculum at the end of the nineteenth century, professional historians turned to the practice of science for a methodology that would distinguish their work from that of the amateurs whose romantic narrative style had come to define history writing in the Victorian period.¹³ Joan Schwartz and Terry Cook write that archivists were the product of this same education:

[T]he rise of ‘professional’ history in the nineteenth century (which coincided exactly with the professionalization of archivists – who were

¹¹ Joan Scott, “Experience,” *Feminists Theorize the Political*, ed. Judith Butler and Joan Scott (New York: Routledge, 1992), pp. 22-40.

¹² Emmanuel Lévinas, *Otherwise Than Being*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Boston: M. Nijoff, 1991), p. 63.

¹³ According to Carl Berger, the ideal of Rankean history gained an unchallenged ascendancy in the United States in the last decades of the nineteenth century. In Canada, the scientific method was slower to take root, in part because fewer Canadians had studied in Germany with Ranke. George Wrong, who was appointed Chair of History at the University of Toronto in 1895, was rather reserved in his support of the new scientific approach, while his counterpart at Queen’s University, the empiricist Adam Shortt, , wholeheartedly welcomed the development. See Carl Berger, *The Writing of Canadian History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986), pp. 1-31.

trained as such historians) squeezed out the story-telling, the ghostly and psychic, the spiritual and the feminine (and of course all 'amateur' women practitioners), in favour of men (exclusively) pursuing a 'scientific' and 'professional' history within the cloister of the archives and the battleground of the highly competitive university seminar. Such historians (and archivists) ignored in their work the real life in families, farms, factories, and local community, and the stories and experiences of women, among others, in favour of national politics, administration, diplomacy, war, and the experiences of men in power. Such historians... also venerated (and justified) their 'scientific' methods and conclusions as fact-based, objective, neutral, dispassionate – a means to recover the Truth about the past.¹⁴

By following the procedures of the scientist, the accumulation and verification of facts in a detached manner, historians hoped to find in the archives the means with which to reconstruct the past.

Scientific objectivity has been the creed of the professional historian since the Rankean revolution of the late nineteenth century.¹⁵ Objectivity was maintained by proscribing the author from his text.¹⁶ Writing in a God-like voice,¹⁷ the narrator of history established the truthfulness of his account by feigning a judicial detachment from his subject.¹⁸ Pierre Nora sums up the effect of all this distancing of author from subject: "For a century, the scientific project

¹⁴ Joan Schwartz and Terry Cook, "Archives, Records, and Power: The Making of Modern Memory," *Archival Science*, No. 2: 2002, pp. 16-17.

¹⁵ See Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream. The 'Objectivity Question' and the American Historical Profession* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), pp. 21-31, where he discusses the contribution of German historian Leopold von Ranke to the making of the American historical profession. Ranke was and still is considered the father of modern historical scholarship, but Novick argues that the Americans who studied with Ranke misrepresented his approach due to mistranslation. Ranke's famous dictum, the past '*wie es eigentlich gewesen*', was understood by the Americans to mean 'as it really was' or 'as it actually was'. In fact, the word *eigentlich* had an ambiguity it no longer has; it also meant 'essentially', which is the way Ranke used it since his historical project was to penetrate to the 'essence' of things.

¹⁶ Novick writes: "[Ranke's] wish, expressed in the preface to the *World History*, to 'as it were, extinguish myself', reflected a widespread romantic desire to open oneself to the flow of intuitive perception. (The young historian who in the 1970s proposed a 'psychedelic' approach to history – altered states of consciousness as a means for historians to project themselves back into the past – was thus in some respects truer to the essence of Ranke's approach than empiricists who never lifted their eyes from the documents.)," p. 28.

¹⁷ According to Karen Halttunen, the omniscient narrator of professional history convention was modeled on the objective voice found in nineteenth-century realist novels. See Karen Halttunen, "Self, Subject, and the 'Barefoot Historian'," *The Journal of American History*, June 2002, p. 20.

¹⁸ Historian is identified with the masculine gender here because few women had access to a university education until the 1960s, later in Quebec. See *Creating Historical Memory: English*

has compelled historians to disappear behind their work, hide their personalities under their erudition, barricade themselves behind their note cards, flee from themselves into another age, express themselves only through others.”¹⁹ But are historians ever truly absent from their texts?²⁰

The subject of this thesis is David Ross McCord and his collection. How can I adequately represent this man’s life and his work when all I have access to are the facts (surface) of his existence? To know another person, to understand what motivates their actions in the world, implies going beyond appearances. Surfaces give the illusion of a perceptible reality, but they often mask another type of truth that lies buried beneath.²¹ In the words of philosopher Ken Wilber, “exterior surfaces can be seen, but interior depth must be interpreted.”²² To write about McCord and his collection without reference to his interior life would eliminate most of the story. Collecting, a private activity, is all about self-expression. To understand why and what David McCord collected involves explanations that inevitably lead back to the self.

Objectivity, and the language of science from which it derives its authority, does not easily lend itself to writing about the self. By definition, objectivity bans all possibility of self-expression. The language of science uses ‘it’ not ‘I’. The ‘I’ belongs to the expressive/aesthetic sphere, to people like McCord who have a vision. What attracted me to McCord in the first place, and what kept me on his trail when giving up seemed so much easier, is what historian

Canadian Histories and the Work of History, ed. Boutilier, Beverley, and Alison Prentice (Vancouver: University of British Columbia, 1997).

¹⁹ Pierre Nora, ed., “Présentation,” *Essais d’égo-histoire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1987), p. 5.

²⁰ According to American historian Michael O’Brien, the self is inescapable. “In practice, the historian, if not omnipotent, has a power difficult to constrain. She or he is everywhere in the narrative, in the tone of voice, in the expression of significance, and in the choice of evidence. Those narrated speak only when asked to, say only what the historian wishes to have known, and (unless it is a work of recent history) are unable to respond, being dead,” from “Of Cats, Historians and Gardeners,” *The Journal of American History*, June 2002, p. 51.

²¹ Gabrielle Spiegel makes this same point in “Towards a Theory of the Middle Ground: Historical Writing in the Age of Postmodernism,” *Historia a debate*, Vol. 1, p. 169, where she uses a similar formulation to describe Milan Kundera’s theory of history in his *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*: “History...is the illusion of an intelligible reality, that intelligible surface that cloaks the presence of an unintelligible truth.”

²² Ken Wilber, *The Marriage of Sense and Soul* (New York: Random House, 1998), p. 117.

Linda Orr calls a “radical, intimate impulse.”²³ It was through my own subjectivity that I gained insight into McCord’s life and collecting practice, just as it was his own subjectivity that provided the impetus for his collecting. To leave out the self in a history that is about one man’s attempt at self-creation makes no sense.

Writing about an individual life invites an intimate approach. I cannot hope to understand the workings of McCord’s interior life – be a witness to expressions of love, envy, compassion, wonder, rage, and sadness – if I adopt the objectifying gaze of empirical science to the exclusion of all else. These emotional states are events of the interior life. “Interior events are not seen in an exterior or objective manner,” writes Wilber, “they are seen by introspection and interpretation.”²⁴ I may come across a heavily annotated letter by McCord, with passages boldly underlined in jet black ink, or see a photograph of the interior of his drawing room filled with objects; but unless I am content with describing the contents of this letter or his drawing room, I must enter into a dialogue with their owner to understand their meaning. David McCord is not an object that I can stare at, dispassionately, across the divide of time. Like myself, he is a subject who once loved, experienced the pain of loss, experienced joy and pangs of hunger, laughed and cried, felt disappointment – in short, every state identified with the human condition. Science has provided us with a highly effective method for discerning ‘truth’, but it is with art that we make meaning. That being said, my approach remains firmly tied to the archives. If empirical can be defined as knowledge gained from observed experience, then the archive is the only place where any part of McCord’s experience remains available to witness and dialogue with. Without the archive, my conversation with McCord would remain a monologue.

It is an unusual relationship, this connection I have forged with the dead: by necessity, a one-sided link based on written records and objects from the McCord Museum, but a relationship nonetheless. My authority as a professional

²³ See Linda Orr, “Intimate Images: Subjectivity and History – Stael, Michelet and Tocqueville,” in *A New Philosophy of History*, ed. Frank Ankersmit and Hans Kellner (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), pp. 89-107.

historian rests on my ability to accurately translate these sources into a ‘truthful’ portrait of my subject and his times. This endeavour frequently overwhelms the poet in me. I wish to restore a complexity to the man’s life in defiance of the simple dichotomies created by nineteenth-century historical discourse which values fact over fiction, history over memory, reason over feeling, bodies of knowledge over human bodies, and prioritizes sight over touch. Poetry evokes, speaks in the language of metaphor, relies to makes its point.²⁵ “Poetry in its making and reception [is] bound up with the somatic, with memory as well as the sense experience, and with the over determination of symbols,” writes poet Susan Stewart.²⁶ As a form of expression, it is much more adept at capturing the nuances of self-concept. The past I examine in this thesis is radically pared down, and at its core is a self. To write about an individual life calls for an approach and a language that corresponds to the human scale of the project, tools for romancing the self.

A methodology that emphasizes relationship rather than detachment would appear to have more in common with psychoanalysis than with the discipline of history; yet this is precisely how most people outside the historical profession go about understanding the past. In the words of feminist historian Meredith Tax, “history is nothing if it is devoid of the self – yourself, myself.”²⁷ It is through their connections with others both past and present that young people establish their identities. Older people will sometimes share their stories of the past so that history does not have to repeat itself or to remind youth that the rights and privileges they now enjoy were hard-won struggles and not automatic givens. Whether sharing anecdotes at a reunion to consolidate family memories or retelling painful stories at an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting in an attempt to leave the past behind, people everywhere use past experience to inform how they live in the present, experience being the sum total of what is transmitted to us

²⁴ Wilber, *Ibid*, p. 117.

²⁵ Deena Metzger, *Writing for Your Life* (New York: Random House, 1992), p. 11.

²⁶ Interview with Susan Stewart by Jon Thompson, *FreeVerse*, 2003, p. 2

²⁷ Meredith Tax, “I Had Been Hungry All The Years,” *Between Women*, ed. Carol Ascher et al., (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 355.

through our senses, thoughts, and feelings.²⁸ Making history is a universal human activity, one we do surrounded by witnesses.

“Historians are, perhaps, our oldest professional observers of human affairs,” writes Robert Coles.²⁹ We, as historians, are charged with bearing witness to what we, as a collectivity, dare not forget. Jill Lepore discusses the tendency of micro-historians to identify with the judge figure in their works. She suggests that by identifying with the judge, micro-historians are able to maintain distance (or illusion of distance) from their subjects, which regular biographers often fail to do.³⁰ It is this distance which Lepore identifies with the micro-historical approach that I wish to inhabit rather than maintain. My task is not to pass judgment on McCord the man but rather to understand his process as a historian and collector. Being a witness helps me negotiate the problem of distance and closeness by bringing an awareness of my own subjectivity in relation to his. “[W]hat constitutes the specificity of the innovative figure of the witness is, indeed, not the mere telling, not the mere fact of reporting of the accident, but the witness’s readiness to become himself a medium of the testimony...,” writes Shoshana Felman.³¹ Just as McCord became a witness for his parents’ generation, it is through me as embodied witness to his documented collecting practices, that David Ross McCord’s story is told.

In the pages that follow, I use the term witness to describe my activities as a historian, favouring it over Coles’ ‘observer’ or Lepore’s ‘judge’. Why? What does it mean to be a witness to the past? To be a witness means to be present at an event and be able to report on it, but it also means to testify to an inner state of being. The witness brings together two separate traditions, the scientific and the

²⁸ Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen make this same point in their study of how Americans make use of history in their everyday lives. For most of the study participants, the word ‘history’ was a pejorative term associated with unpleasant experiences in school: the regurgitation of facts on exams, or the forced memorization of dates that had no relevance to their lives. What held more meaning was the word ‘experience’. See *Presence of the Past: Popular uses of History in American Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998).

²⁹ Robert Coles, *Doing Documentary Work*, (New York: New York Public Library and Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 21. A psychoanalyst by profession, Coles is also the founder of the documentary studies program at the University of North Carolina.

³⁰ Jill Lepore, “Reflections on Microhistory and Biography,” *The Journal of American History*, June 2001, p. 140.

contemplative. To be a witness I must be able to see with my eyes but I must also be able to see with my inner eye. By defining my role in this way, I am laying claim to the empirical training I received as a student of history, while also acknowledging the form of knowing identified with the contemplative practices of yoga and meditation. Witness studies is a new field of academic research. Interdisciplinary in its origins, it combines “Holocaust studies, Latin American *testimonio*, and atomic bomb survivor studies together with approaches ranging from the historical and anthropological to the literary and philosophical....”³²

To be a witness “complicates the notion of historical truth,” writes Kelly Oliver.³³ To be a witness acknowledges that there is more than one way of knowing the past.³⁴ *The Canadian Oxford Dictionary* defines witness as: “a person present at some event or occurrence and able to give information about it from observation;” and someone who is able “to state one’s belief in.”³⁵ The definition suggests that truth is not absolute but is, in part, dependent on individual interpretation. The ambiguity of the definition sets up a tension between two different ways of perceiving historical truth. At one end of the continuum, there is history that favours the factual and relies on the eyewitness for verification. At the other end, there is psychoanalysis, which listens for the unfamiliar and the disruptive in personal memory.³⁶ To witness, therefore, means to be able to see with the eye as well as with our ‘third’ eye. It suggests that history is both what is seen and what cannot be seen. The concept of witnessing makes it possible to write about what I know but can’t see and what I see but can’t know. In the context of writing about McCord and his collection, it means

³¹ Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, *Testimony. Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and Theory*, p. 60.

³² Ana Douglass and Thomas Vogler, ed., *Witness and Memory: The Discourse of Trauma*, p. 1.

³³ Kelly Oliver, *Witnessing. Beyond Recognition*, p. 2.

³⁴ David Glassberg in *Sense of History. The Place of the Past in American Life* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001), p. 6, also writes about two different kinds of knowing about the past. “While professional historians talk about having an ‘interpretation of history’, something that changes in the light of new evidence, others talk about having a ‘sense of history’, a perspective on the past at the core of who they are and the people and places they care about. ‘Sense of history’ reflects the intersection of the intimate and the historical....”

³⁵ Katherine Barber, ed., *The Canadian Oxford Dictionary* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 1671-2.

³⁶ Oliver, *Ibid*, p. 2.

writing about a man I did not know and about a collection that I have seen in parts but whose provenance, in many instances, remains a mystery.

How this tension manifested in a real-life situation is described by the psychoanalyst Dori Laub, founder of the Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies at Yale University, in *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*. Laub, who attended a conference of historians, psychoanalysts, and artists meeting to discuss strategies for Holocaust education, recounts the details of a heated debate that ensued after the group watched the taped testimony of a woman who had witnessed the uprising by prisoners at Auschwitz. The woman recounted seeing four chimneys explode and burst into flames. The historians insisted that in reality only one chimney had collapsed, and that fact made the woman an unreliable witness in their view. The psychoanalysts understood her testimony differently. To them, the woman was not testifying to the number of chimneys blown up but to the act of resistance in a place where resistance seemed unimaginable. Laub concludes that the woman “was testifying not simply to empirical historical facts, but to the very secret of survival and of resistance to extermination.”³⁷

What qualities do we need to cultivate to avoid bearing false witness? As I have mentioned, witnessing for historians is a contemplative act that involves attendance at the archives. It is where I went to make sense of McCord. Visiting an archive is a highly ritualized procedure, which involves the hand and the eye in a choreography of knowing. It is from this embodied act of sitting with McCord’s papers amassed during his years as a collector and viewing objects from his collection that meaning is created about the man and his work. The archive is where historians have traditionally gone for factual sources and the postmodern critique of the archive does not eliminate this need: the archive remains the only check on the historian’s subjectivity.

The approach I pursue in this thesis is also inspired by new writing on auto/biography that places the subjectivity of the author at the centre of the

³⁷ Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, p. 62. This incident is also discussed in Kelly Oliver’s, *Witnessing. Beyond Recognition*, p. 2.

process.³⁸ To embrace self-referentiality as I have done here is to acknowledge the paradigm shift that has taken place across the humanities since the 1960s. The idea that historians are neutral observers sending dispatches back from the archives has for the most part been replaced by the image of historian as writer whose stories, though based on careful research, have coherence because of the meanings attached to them by their author. My reading of Carolyn Steedman's *Landscape for a Good Woman: A Story of Two Lives* at the beginning of this project encouraged me to rethink the historian's traditional use of the third person in historical narratives. In her autobiography about growing-up in working-class London, Steedman combines memories and stories told her by her mother with a social-historical analysis derived from her training as a historian to understand her own and her mother's behaviour.³⁹ Steedman's construction of a double life narrative suggested the ways in which individual memoir and the reconstruction of another's experiences could illuminate each other. Liz Stanley has identified feminist autobiography with texts that "self-consciously and self-confidently mix genres and conventions. Within them fact and fiction, fantasy and reality, biography and autobiography, self and others, individuals and networks, not only co-exist but intermingle in ways that encourage, not merely permit, active readership." These texts, "challenge the boundaries of conventional autobiographical form, indeed play with some of its conventions such as the 'autobiographical pact' of truth-telling, a narrative that moves uni-directionally from birth/beginning to maturity/resolution/end, and the insistence on a unitary self."⁴⁰ My intention here is not to write auto/biography, but to find a form that

³⁸ See Helen Buss, *Mapping Ourselves: Canadian Women's Autobiography in English* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1993), Kathryn Church, *Forbidden Narratives: Critical Autobiography as Social Science* (Amsterdam: Gordon and Breach, 1995), Marlene Kadar, ed., *Essays on Life Writing: From Genre to Critical Practice* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press), Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, *Reading Autobiography: A guide for interpreting life narratives* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), Liz Stanley, *The Auto/biographical I: the theory and practice of feminist auto/biography* (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 1992), special issue on feminist auto/biography, *Gender and History*, Vol. 2, No. 1, Spring 1990, Carolyn Steedman, *Past Tenses. Essays on Writing, Autobiography and History* (London: Rivers Oram Press, 1992).

³⁹ Jeremy Popkin, *History, Historians and Autobiography* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), p. 253.

⁴⁰ Liz Stanley, *The Auto/biographical 'I'*, p. 247.

will accommodate a reading of McCord's life that allows for the creative exchange between self and other.

One of the incentives for reading and writing biography comes from the opportunity it provides for self-examination.⁴¹ Biography incites us to think reflexively, and as we do so we move back and forth between self and other, along a continuum of shared human experience. As I pursued McCord through the archives of his museum in downtown Montreal, looking for traces of his passage, and as I walked the same streets he walked a century before, seeking the sights that once held his gaze, I was comparing his life and his city to mine. "Biography offers a heightened and sustained occasion for such calculations," writes Sven Birkerts. "We may be working through the life of a person with whom we appear to have little or nothing in common, but at every point we are comparing the pleasure and privations of X's childhood with those of our own...."⁴² Discovering our identities is not something we do on our own in isolation. Becoming ourselves is always a collective project, which we do in relation to others.

Writing someone's biography, I would argue, is as much about finding ourselves as it is about losing ourselves in the life of another. In a time of fractured identities, indeterminate loyalties, and shape-shifting selves, people, myself included, have turned to life-writing as a way of making sense of our respective life scripts. Telling stories about each other and ourselves is an essential human activity. Shaping a life's narrative from the raw materials of experience and memory is a necessary part of self-creation. It is only too clear, when memory has been wiped clean by illness, how central our stories are in defining who we are as individuals.

I have come to believe that the best way to remember the dead is by introducing them to the living as human beings who have something to say to us in the present moment. It is by "raising them up from the graveyard of dead contexts, and helping them take up new lives among the living," writes David Harlan in his introduction to *The Degradation of American History*, that historians

⁴¹ James Clifford is an anthropologist who does ethnography self-referentially. See James Clifford "On Ethnographic Authority," *Representations*, Vol. 1, No. 2, Spring 1983, pp. 118-132.

⁴² Sven Birkerts, "Losing Ourselves in Biography," reprinted in *Harper's*, March 1995, p. 24.

fulfill their responsibilities to the dead.⁴³ My intention is neither to memorialize David Ross McCord by writing his life story, nor to recreate the milieu in which he lived, nor to delve into museum building in Canada. Instead, what follows is the record of an extended conversation, where David McCord and I touch upon varied subjects: the impact of loss; the role of individual memory in the making of history; and the struggle for identity; but whose purpose is to shed some light not only on the past but also on how we transmit it to future generations and what it means for us today.

III

My decision to write history as a form of life-writing, or *ego-histoire* as it is called by French historians, comes at a time when there is an unprecedented interest in the lives of the rich and the notorious.⁴⁴ Biography, autobiography, and memoir writing have never been more popular among the general reading public. Many people in North America want nothing better than to understand their lives through the mediated experience of glamorous strangers. The enormous success of TV talk shows such as *Oprah* and mass circulation magazines such as *People*, speaks to a widespread craving for life stories. 'Collective voyeurism' is the term social critics have ascribed to this phenomenon of citizens in the advanced capitalist countries taking refuge in other people's stories as an escape from existential emptiness.⁴⁵

In the past decade, academic historians in both Europe and North America have come to share this fascination with life narratives. In her introduction to a collection of biographical essays entitled *The New Biography*, Jo Burr Margadant writes: "The resurrection of biography ends four decades of historical writing, during which – under the weight of interpretative approaches drawn from the social sciences – individual life stories lay nearly as dormant for academic history

⁴³ David Harlan, *The Degradation of American History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), p. xxxii.

⁴⁴ Pierre Nora, ed., "Présentation," *Essais d'ego-histoire*.

⁴⁵ See Mark Kingwell, *The World We Want. Virtue, Vice, and the Good Citizen* (Toronto: Viking, 2000), p. 2.

as the dead.”⁴⁶ As an American writing French history, Margadant’s program of study began with the debates within the *Annales* school of French historiography whose initial project was to write totalizing history. Taking as their subject matter large regions depicted over long periods of time – the practitioners of the *Annales* approach analyzed geographic regions, economic structures and social movements – biography seemed destined for extinction from French historiography.⁴⁷ Reacting to the macro approach of their predecessors, a second generation of *Annales* historians reintroduced historical biography but in a much altered form.⁴⁸ Gone was the emphasis on the life and times of kings and powerful statesmen. In the microhistories, often the product of tenacious digging in judicial archives, it was the common folk who took centre stage, their lives captured in a series of discrete vignettes. Similar to the experience in France and the United States, historical biography in Canada found itself pushed to the margins of the discipline in the 1970s by the practices of social history. Given the agenda of social historians to write ‘history from below’, to restore to the historical record the lives of the poor, the exploited, and the dispossessed, it is not surprising that historians balked at carrying on the Canadian tradition of writing about the lives of European explorers and prominent politicians. Canadian and Quebec historians, however, showed little inclination to follow their *Annales* counterparts in writing microhistories of the type made famous by Natalie Davis and Carlo Ginzburg, despite microhistories best-selling appeal.⁴⁹ In English Canada, with its long history of biographical writing, biography as a genre was never totally

⁴⁶ Jo Burr Margadant, *The New Biography. Performing Femininity in Nineteenth-Century France* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2000), p. 1.

⁴⁷ A. Lloyd Moote, “Introduction: New Bottles and New Wine: The Current State of Early Modernist Biographical Writing,” *French Historical Studies*, Vol. 19, No. 4, Fall 1996, p. 913.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 913-914.

⁴⁹ An exception perhaps is McKillop’s bestselling *The Spinster & the prophet: Florence Deeks, H.G. Wells, and the mystery of the purloined past* (Toronto: McFarland, Walter and Ross, 2000). For a discussion of the influence of the *Annales* school on Quebec historiography, see Alfred Dubuc, “L’influence de l’école des annals au Québec,” *RHAF*, Vol. 33, No. 3, décembre 1979, pp. 357-386. Also see Carlo Ginzburg, “Microhistory: Two or Three Things That I Know about It,” *Critical Inquiry*, Autumn 1993, pp. 10-35, Jill Lepore, “Reflections on Microhistory and Biography,” *The Journal of American History*, June 2001, pp. 129-144, Giovanni Levi, “On Microhistory,” *New Perspectives on Historical Writing*, ed. Peter Burke (London: Polity Press, 1991), pp. 93-113, and Alf Ludtke, ed., *The History of Everyday Life: Reconstructing Historical Experiences and Ways of Life* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995).

eclipsed by social history. The ongoing presence of the *Dictionary of Canadian Biography* project helped maintain its profile.⁵⁰ Traditional biographies continued to be published during the 1970s, 80s and 90s, and conferences organized around the theme, but they weren't the most widely acclaimed histories and the conferences were not the most well attended.⁵¹

In fact, the writing of biography in Canada has gone through several cycles since the inception of the historical profession at the end of the nineteenth century. Many of the first histories written about the northern half of North America were hagiographic treatments of the lives of the first Europeans to settle New France and later Canada. P. A. Buckner writes that "prior to the First World War, biography was the preferred form of writing history in Canada."⁵² The 1920s saw a revival in the form as historians followed suit, writing critical portraits of the heroes of late-nineteenth century romantic nationalism.⁵³ In this, they were following in the footsteps of Lytton Strachey and Virginia Woolf who reinvented the genre in the English-speaking world by turning the Victorian maxim of 'great men, great events' on its head.⁵⁴ In their separate ways, Lytton Strachey's *Eminent Victorians* and Virginia Woolf's experiments in biography were both attacks on the symbols and mores of their fathers' generation. At McGill University, professors William Waugh and E. R. Adair, influenced by what was then the 'new biography', took on the task of deflating the hero of the Plains of Abraham by "...showing him to have been snobbish, rash, and untrustworthy, possessing no special military abilities, few social graces," and, in Adair's words, suffering from a "social inferiority complex."⁵⁵ It is unlikely that David McCord read Waugh's book-length study on Wolfe. He died two years after Waugh's book was published. But it may have been McCord's hagiographic treatment of

⁵⁰ See P.B. Waite, "Journeys through Thirteen Volumes: The Dictionary of Canadian Biography," *CHR*, Vol. 76, No. 3, September 1995, pp. 464-481.

⁵¹ In 1991 Canadian and Irish historians gathered at the University of Edinburgh to discuss biography and history. From those proceedings came *Boswell's Children: The Art of the Biographer* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1992).

⁵² P.A. Buckner, "Canadian Biography and the Search for Joseph Howe," *Acadiensis*, Vol. XIV, No. 1, Autumn 1984, p. 105.

⁵³ Carl Berger, *The Writing of Canadian History*, p. 219.

⁵⁴ See Michael Holroyd, *Basil Street Blues* (New York and London: W.W. Norton, 1999), pp. 12-13.

the 'hero of the Plains of Abraham' that Waugh had in mind when he penned his own portrait of Wolfe.

In Canada, historical biography's 'golden age' is most identified with the work of Donald Creighton. During the 1950s Creighton set the standard with the publication of his two-volume treatment of the life of John A. Macdonald. In this work and in others that followed, Canadian history was told from the vantage point of its heroic political actors. Written within this Carlylean frame of 'great men, great events', the biographic subject was presented as a paradigmatic figure, a vehicle for expressing a truth about the times or some important historical conjuncture. According to Carl Berger, Creighton's *John A. Macdonald: The Young Politician* "marked a beginning in the revival of interest in a type of historical literature that had been disregarded... and that was later to become the dominant form in Canadian historiography."⁵⁶

Creighton, who wrote in the literary romantic tradition of Parkman and others, was responding to the preponderance of structural histories of the 1930s. Innis's influential study of the fur trade, which brought to the fore economic structures and left little place for individual agency, was one such example. "History", Creighton wrote in 1945, "is not made by inanimate forces and human automats: it is made by living men and women, impelled by an endless variety of ideas and emotions, which can best be understood by the insight into character, that imaginative understanding of people which is one of the great attributes of literary art."⁵⁷ His writing was an attempt to re-establish the link between history and literature that had been seriously weakened by the social-scientific model of historical research that then prevailed. Fifty years later, the motivations that compelled Creighton to turn to biography have moved me to do the same.

It may seem strange that Creighton, who has been vilified by a subsequent generation of historians for being a reactionary bigot, should have something to say to me half a century after he wrote. His thoughts on Canadian nationalism are now widely discredited, but his approach to doing history, I would argue, speaks

⁵⁵ Carl Berger, p. 219.

⁵⁶ Ibid, p. 218.

⁵⁷ Donald Creighton as cited in Berger, *The Writing of Canadian History*, p. 220.

loudly to a generation raised on histories that were saturated with description but whose meaning was sometimes buried under a mountain of statistics. Too much 'science' and not enough imagination have made some of these histories unreadable. Carl Berger credits the romantic movement with having influenced Creighton's writings: "The romantic movement had given an enormous impetus to the development of the historical imagination and to efforts to comprehend the past in its own terms. The romantic historian did not start with a question that led to analysis; he thought of history as a drama and he sought to tell a story."⁵⁸

McCord also encouraged people to think about history in this way. In his museum in downtown Montreal, David McCord taught Canadians about their past by evoking the lives of exemplary individuals. His was a romantic vision peopled by spiritual pioneers, poets, generals, artists, and members of David McCord's own family. These were the people he felt best personified the qualities needed to build Canada's fledgling nation. qualities he hoped his visitors would try to emulate. In 1919, a few months before McGill University officially accepted his donation of the collection, David Ross McCord wrote:

The Spiritual Pioneers are abstractions to most people – particularly to all the people of Canada – they are not personalities.... Canada is beginning to take her place as a nation and assume responsibilities, but she must be taught – just as the Knights of an Order are assembled in the Chapel of their Order with their banners – I want to assemble at the centre of Canada the Pioneers with their Manuscripts – and as the roll is called – by and through their Manuscripts – and nothing else can take their place – and the answer is "present" – distance is annihilated – they are no longer abstractions – they are personalities.⁵⁹

By approaching the past from the perspective of individual stories, David McCord hoped to make history a 'living thing'.

In Quebec, where social history's hold over the profession has been more complete, biography fell on even harder times. According to B. Vigod, historians

⁵⁸ Berger, *The Writing of Canadian History*, p. 223.

⁵⁹ MCFP, file #2055, DRM to Miss Horden and Miss Broughton, February 13, 1919. McCord's letters to potential donors were often tailored to reflect the kind of materials he was seeking. If historical manuscripts were the object of his search, then they became the most valued object.

“left the field entirely to others.”⁶⁰ Since the 1970s, most Quebec historians have been preoccupied with describing the changes that transformed Quebec into a modern state. Their interest lay in evaluating the impact of large-scale structural changes brought about by industrialization, urbanization, and bureaucratization. They adopted a quantitative research methodology, based on the belief that historical ‘truth’ is best served by adopting a scientific approach. Historians such as Marcel Trudel, who pioneered this method, were writing in reaction to a previous generation identified with “*l’histoire-éloquence, à l’histoire sentiment et à la belle histoire*.”⁶¹ The role of the historian, they believed, was to reconstitute the past as accurately as possible. As Jean-Marie Fecteau writes, it was a generation “who set about curbing any tendency for their work to be regarded in emotional or subjective terms, confining themselves to a systematic and ‘objective’ study of the lived experience of the population within this territory.”⁶² In his critique of history writing in Quebec, Ron Rudin has also remarked upon the continued dominance of the scientific approach: “Quebec historiography also appears somewhat distinctive at century’s end because of continued widespread support for the notion that historians are engaged in a scientific endeavor, relatively free of value judgments.”⁶³ This way of writing about the past did not easily accommodate itself to individual narratives.

There were some exceptions however. Professors Brian Young and Andrée Lévesque, both at McGill University, published biographies (which I will discuss in greater detail below).⁶⁴ As social historians, their biographical method was rooted in social and economic theories that situated the origins of collective identities in the material circumstances of everyday life, a position identified with Marxism but not exclusively so. Both brought to their writings positivist

⁶⁰ B. Vigod, “Biography and Political Culture in Quebec,” *Acadiensis*, Vol. VII, No. 1, Autumn, 1977, p. 141.

⁶¹ See *Le Devoir*, “Marcel Trudel: entre science et polémique,” 8 janvier, 2006, p. E8.

⁶² Jean-Marie Fecteau, “Between Scientific Enquiry and the Search for a Nation: Quebec Historiography as Seen by Ronald Rudin,” *Canadian Historical Review*, Vol. 80, No. 4, Dec. 1999, p. 655.

⁶³ Ronald Rudin, *Making History in Twentieth-Century Quebec* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), p. 217.

assumptions about the historical craft that originated with the Rankeian revolution of the late nineteenth century.

By the time Young and Lévesque's biographies were published, in 1981 and 1999 respectively, the idea that identity, collective or individual, was the product of anonymous economic forces had drawn its share of detractors. Beginning in the 1960s with the publication of *The Making of the English Working Class*, E.P. Thompson provided an alternative perspective when he accorded culture the central role in determining class-consciousness. Forty years later, in her introduction to *The New Biography*, Jo Burr Margadant described the latest challenge as coming from ethnographic studies.⁶⁵ According to this theory, "social identities take shape within an historically specific cultural setting that imparts meaning to the materiality of life and not the other way around."⁶⁶ In other words, it is up to the individuals and communities to make meaning from their material circumstances, and not the material circumstances itself that possess or give meaning.

Under the old social history paradigm, historians assumed that individual lives could somehow be made to represent, in an unmediated way, broad economic and social changes. Historians were seemingly more at ease with describing how large-scale change affected institutions than with how individuals experienced change. The tension between the public world and the private life of an individual, a staple of good biographical writing, was almost non-existent within the social historical paradigm. There was no space for the subjective experience on which biographical writing depends. As Andrée Lévesque herself points out, social historians trained to recover the past from government documents of one sort or another were confounded before the obvious 'subjectivity' of personal letters and journal entries.

⁶⁴ See the special issue on biography in *Revue d'histoire de l'Amérique française*, Vol. 54, No. 1, summer 2000, especially Suzanne Morton's, "Faire le saut: la biographie peut-elle être de l'histoire sociale?" pp. 103-110.

⁶⁵ Jo Burr Margadant, ed., *The New Biography: Performing Femininity in Nineteenth-Century France*, p. 4.

⁶⁶ See Sally Cole, "Anthropological Lives: The Reflexive Tradition in a Social Science," in *Essays on Life Writing: From Genre to Critical Practice*, ed. Marlene Kadar (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), pp. 113-127.

Ainsi l'historienne, encore sous l'égide du positivisme, aborde-t-elle non sans prudence, voire avec une grande méfiance presque paralysante, ces autobiographies, ces journaux intimes et ces lettres, enfin toute cette 'littérature personnelle'... Pour appréhender le passé, le passé retrouvé et recréé, on a plutôt recours aux documents plus 'objectifs': des rapports, des discours, des statistiques.⁶⁷

Subjectivity was to be avoided at all cost.

Brian Young's *Montreal Bourgeois*, published at the beginning of the 1980s, was written to provide an alternative reading of the life of George-Etienne Cartier, 's life, one of the Father's of Confederation. Quick to distance himself from the "whig interpretations" of his predecessors, who championed Cartier as the great Canadian statesman, Young worked "on the assumption that the pocket-book strongly determines actions." His Cartier was cast as a bourgeois gentleman, representative of a social class.⁶⁸ Despite Young's intention "to put flesh on the nebulous figure of a nineteenth-century Canadian politician," Young cast Cartier first and foremost as a type: an 'economic' man whose life choices were attributed to economic self-interest. The reader learns that Cartier had a mistress, that he loved to socialize, and that he was less than scrupulous in his business dealings, what this might tell us about the man and his motivations, beyond what can be explained by his financial interests, remains largely unsaid. Generalizing about a whole class from the life of one individual is always fraught with difficulties: one can always find examples of the opposite type: bourgeois men who were faithful to their wives, domestic in character, and scrupulously honest in commerce.

Andrée Lévesque's study of Jeanne Corbin (1906-1944) treats the life and times of a female activist in the Canadian Communist Party. Where Young proposes to put some flesh on his figure of Cartier, Lévesque apologizes for having only the barest bones to offer her readers: "Cet ouvrage ne reconstitue

⁶⁷ Andrée Lévesque, "La littérature personnelle comme document historique: écrits de trois prosituées: Mogador (1824-1909), Neel Doff (1858-1942), Maimie Pinzer (1855- ?), Madelaine Frédéric, ed., *Entres l'Histoire et le roman: la littérature personnelle*. Actes du Séminaire de Bruxelles (Université de Bruxelles, 1991), p. 45.

⁶⁸ Brian Young, *George-Etienne Cartier, Montreal Bourgeois* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's press, 1981), p. xiii.

cependant pas la vie de Jeanne Corbin. Faute d'écrits personnels ou de vestiges matériels, elle demeure un personnage éluif dont la vie privée, les pensées intimes, les doutes ou les désirs nous échappent."⁶⁹ Neither of the biographies, in fact, attempts to deal with the interior lives of their subjects. Lévesque's book raises the problem facing many would-be biographers who feel their subjects merit full-length biographies but who lack sufficient sources to carry out these projects. Lack of sources is one of the main reasons. "[B]iography remains a genre devoted to socially and culturally exceptional cases," writes French historian Laura Mason. "[B]iographers take as their subjects those who produced evidence that, at the very least, hints at state of mind."⁷⁰ Lévesque resolves this dilemma by sidestepping the problem entirely. "Plutôt que de tomber dans les conjectures, j'ai choisi d'être discrète," she writes in her introduction.⁷¹ Lévesque's reluctance to share her thoughts with the reader without the presence of a certain kind of evidence to back them up is consistent with the social scientific approach to writing biography.⁷²

Brian Young's participation in the creation of the McCord Museum's exhibition and publication, *The McCord Family: A Passionate Vision*, signaled his return to the field of biography. Based on an exhibition of the same name held to inaugurate the re-opening the McCord Museum in 1992, the book was jointly authored with Pam Miller, Donald Fyson, Donald Wright, and Moira McCaffrey. As the first book about the museum, it greatly benefited from a previous project, a detailed inventory of David McCord's family papers and collecting correspondence, undertaken by archivist Pam Miller a decade before. Published in two volumes, Miller's guide to the McCord archives provides researchers with

⁶⁹ Andrée Lévesque, *L'époque de Jeanne Corbin 1906-1944* (Montréal: Remue-ménage, 1999), p. 16.

⁷⁰ Laura Mason, "Silence, Biography and Microhistory," unpublished paper presented at the American Historical Society, Boston, January 2000, p. 8.

⁷¹ Lévesque, *L'époque de Jeanne Corbin*, p. 16.

⁷² Another example is Suzanne Morton's, "Faire le saut: la biographie peut-elle être de l'histoire sociale?" pp. 103-110.

detailed information about the contents of the archive as well as brief biographical sketches of family members, including David Ross McCord.⁷³

The McCord Family: A Passionate Vision was commissioned by the board of the McCord Museum to celebrate the re-opening of their newly renovated building. Not surprisingly, the book gave a very positive account of the McCord family's contributions to Montreal's cultural life during the period of their social prominence in the nineteenth century. The message of the exhibition and the accompanying book follows what I would describe as a recognizably 'whiggish' version of Montreal history. The dominant role played by Montreal's Scottish citizens is celebrated, while the inequalities that made these accomplishments possible are ignored. Social class, gender and race are treated as benign categories, useful to describe certain habits or traits, but otherwise innocent of the dynamics of political and social power that confer status. The exhibition's narrative was a normalizing one, celebrating the successes of one British colonial elite family, while confirming their place in the larger story of Canadian nation building. Whether intended or not, the exhibition encouraged viewers to see Canadian history as a singular narrative, with the role played by the McCord family as natural.⁷⁴ David Ross McCord would certainly have approved since his presence was everywhere in the exhibition and in the book. Seventy years earlier he had told a similar story in the first exhibition of the McCord National Museum in the Joseph house.

The *A Passionate Vision* contains no mention of the family's decline, and yet, I would argue, such a decline is central to understanding of the McCord collection, the English-speaking community from whence it came, and the events that took place at the McCord Museum following the 1992 exhibition. It is these events, including the firing of Pam Miller, which formed the subtext of Brian

⁷³ McCord Museum, *McCord Family Papers 1766-1945*, Vol. I, "Inventory: and Vol. II, "David Ross McCord Collecting Correspondence" (Montreal: McCord Museum, 1986).

⁷⁴ See Sandra Langley, "The McCord Family Exhibit at the McCord Museum of Canadian History," unpublished paper, Concordia University, 1993, pp. 1-51 and Mieke Bal, "Telling Objects: A Narrative Perspective on Collecting," in *The Cultures of Collecting*, ed. John Elsner and Roger Cardinal (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1994), pp. 97-115.

Young's next book, *The Making and Unmaking of a University Museum*.⁷⁵ From the period of the McCord's ascendancy in the mid-nineteenth century to the opening of the 1992 exhibition, Montreal's English-speaking community went from being a powerful majority in the city, to a small and at times, embattled minority. In historian Richard Vaudry's words, the Anglo-Protestant community in nineteenth-century Quebec was "one of the most self-confident and dynamic groups ever seen in the history of this country."⁷⁶ In a sense, *A Passionate Vision* was a last hurrah for those within the museum who saw it, in the words of historian Delphin Muise, "as a vehicle for projecting the history of Montreal's past greatness [and] as a centre of English Canada's elites."⁷⁷ The McCord had spared no expense at mounting what was considered to be the museum's permanent exhibition. After the firing of Pam Miller, however, a new permanent exhibition 'Simply Montreal' was quickly commissioned, and this time there was no mention of the founder David Ross McCord.⁷⁸

Pam Miller was one of the casualties of a new politic that was being enacted at the McCord aimed at changing the museum's profile in the Montreal community and beyond.⁷⁹ Board members, prompted by issues related to government funding, were motivated to boost the museum's attendance figures. The McCord was feeling the pressure to appeal to a broader audience, one that included the majority French-speaking community, and to a lesser extent, people from the immigrant communities. Tourists and school children were groups that

⁷⁵ Brian Young, *The Making and Unmaking of a University Museum: the McCord, 1921-1996* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's Press, 2000).

⁷⁶ Richard Vaudry, *Anglicans and the Atlantic World: High Churchmen, Evangelicals, and the Quebec Connection* (Montreal & Kingston, McGill-Queen's Press, 2003), p. 11.

⁷⁷ Delphin Muise, Brian Young, the Making and Unmaking of a University Museum: The McCord, 1921-1996," *Material History Review*, No. 53, Spring-Summer, 2001, p. 81.

⁷⁸ In 1997, I was hired by the McCord Museum to research the section on David Ross McCord for their new permanent exhibition entitled 'Simply Montreal'. At the last moment, the section on McCord was cut.

⁷⁹ In the spring of 2001, I carried out a series of interviews with a number of the guides who had interpreted *A Passionate History*. I also interviewed Jean-Luc Murray, Coordinator of Educational Programs at the museum. Many of the interviewees spoke candidly of the changes at the McCord. There was, however, no general agreement as to the form these changes took. Some felt that standards were being compromised in order to appeal to a broader public. Others felt that English-speakers were being pushed out. The majority, however, decried the disappearance of David Ross McCord from the museum. Jean-Luc Murray confided to me that discussions had taken place to change the name of the museum to eliminate the McCord connection.

were also targeted. The McCord felt one of the ways to achieve this goal was to distance itself from its reputation as a local institution representing Montreal's English-speaking elite. They did this in a number of ways, including hiring a French-speaking director.⁸⁰ There were other factors at work principally the application of a corporate business model to museum administration, a development shared by museums across North America, which Brian Young discusses at length in his book. Young does, however, ignore the issue of language, which is to tell only part of the story.

Two of the authors of *A Passionate Vision*, Brian Young and Donald Wright, went on to write other pieces on David McCord and the McCord Museum. Young's *The Making and Unmaking of a University Museum: The McCord, 1921-1996* includes two chapters on David Ross McCord and the museum's early history. Young sees McCord's passion for collecting as an expression of a mid-life crisis. Although he gives no explanation as to the origins of this crisis, he goes on to say that it "was only partly individual. Fundamental changes in late-Victorian Canada" were the real reasons McCord abandoned his career in law and politics and turned to collecting fulltime.⁸¹ As a member of Montreal's English-speaking gentry, McCord's world "of seigneurial rents, history, the romantics, and the Natural History Society," had been overtaken by the forces of industrial capitalism.⁸² According to Young, McCord's desire to collect objects representing "decisive moments for the British Empire in Canada," sprang from a desire to return to the world of his childhood, when the McCord family name still carried authority.⁸³

Donald Wright argues that the museum was McCord's reaction to modernity. "It was an attempt to make sense of modernity, not through rejection

⁸⁰ A new director was hired at the end of the 1990s, Victor Dickenson, who has shifted the direction of the museum to bring it more inline with its mandate as a university institution committed to research.

⁸¹ Brian Young, *The Making and Unmaking of a University Museum: the McCord, 1921-1996*, p. 32.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid, p. 34.

but through the creation of a psychological retreat.”⁸⁴ Wright’s approach borrows heavily from T.J. Lear’s analysis of anti-modern currents in turn-of-the-century America. McCord’s fascination with Native cultures and his championing of the imperialist cause with its commitment to the worship of the cult of militarism – two late-Victorian responses to “modernity’s relentless commitment to innovation and transience and rootlessness,” – according to Wright, came together in his museum project.⁸⁵ Both Young and Wright sought explanations for McCord’s collecting in the “social and intellectual climate of the time.”⁸⁶ Perhaps this is why they did not seek to engage with the literature from the burgeoning interdisciplinary field of collecting studies, much of which is influenced by psychoanalytic theory and semiotics.⁸⁷ In Young’s work the main focus is on the institution itself. Wright’s approach pays more attention to McCord’s motivations, but the assumptions he makes about the influences that shaped McCord’s museum project are similar to Young’s. By favouring a perspective that sees human behaviour as reacting to, as opposed to acting upon, the forces of economic and social change, it is not surprising that Young and Wright did not seek

⁸⁴ Donald Wright, “W.D. Lighthall and David Ross McCord: Antimodernism and English-Canadian Imperialism, 1880s-1918,” *Journal of Canadian Studies*, Vol. 32, No. 2, 1997, p. 135. Also see “Remembering War in Imperial Canada: David Ross McCord and The McCord National Museum,” *Fontanus*, IX, 1996, pp. 12-19.

⁸⁵ Donald Wright, “W.D. Lighthall and David Ross McCord: Antimodernism and English-Canadian Imperialism, 1880s-1918,” p. 134.

⁸⁶ Donald Wright, “David Ross McCord’s Crusade,” in *The McCord Family: A Passionate Vision*, Pam Miller et al. (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1992), p. 89.

⁸⁷ See T. J. Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981). On collecting and collectors see: Stephen Bann, *The Clothing of Clio: A Study of the Representation of History in Nineteenth-Century Britain and France* (Cambridge, England: University of Cambridge, 1984), *Under the Sign. John Bargrave as Collector, Traveler, and Witness* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1994), Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly and Eugene Rochberg-Halton, *The Meaning of Things. Domestic Symbols and the Self* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1981), John Elsner and Roger Cardinal, ed., *The Cultures of Collecting* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1994), Shepard Krech III, ed., *Passionate Hobby* (Rhode Island: Haffenreffer Museum of Anthropology 1994), Werner Muensterberger, *Collecting: An Unruly Passion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), Susan Pearce, *Collecting in Contemporary Practice* (London: Sage, 1998), Susan Pearce ed., *Museum Studies in Material Culture* (Leicester: Leicester University 1989), Della Pollock, *Exceptional Spaces: Essays in Performance and History* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984).

explanations for McCord's museum project in theories that focus on the self. In this respect, my work begins where theirs ends.

The literature I consulted on collecting comes from a relatively new field of enquiry called Collecting Studies: itself a sub-genre of material culture which now dominates museum studies. The study of collections has come into its own in the last twenty years with the proliferation and expansion of museums in North America and Europe.⁸⁸ Although interdisciplinary in approach, a consensus has appeared in the literature, with writers focusing on why people collect rather than on the collections themselves. Collecting is thus treated as a cultural process rather than as cultural history.⁸⁹ Post-war intellectual currents that have shaped the direction of collecting studies include psychoanalysis, the structural/linguistic turn, and post-Marxist critiques of ideology and the production of knowledge.

Much of the work on collecting shows, either directly or indirectly, the influence of Sigmund Freud. The most traditional interpretation of Freud as applied to collecting is found in Werner Muensterberger's *Collecting: An Unruly Passion*. He argues that collecting is a reaction to childhood feelings of abandonment and vulnerability resulting from some form of unassimilated childhood trauma. Collecting helps resolve these feelings, by substituting stable objects that the adult collector can possess, for unreliable human intimacy. In Walter Benjamin's words: "...ownership is the most intimate relationship that one can have to objects. Not that they come alive in him; it is he who lives in them."⁹⁰ Jean Baudrillard brings more complexity to the subject in his influential article, "The System of Collecting."⁹¹ To earlier Freudian assumptions, Baudrillard adds another layer of interpretation borrowed from post-structural critiques of ideology. Baudrillard's interest is in understanding the regulatory role of objects, "...[their] fundamental role in keeping the lives of the individual subject or of the

⁸⁸ See Susan Pearce, "Museum Studies in Material Culture," in *Museum Studies in Material Culture*, ed. Susan Pearce, pp. 1-10.

⁸⁹ Susan Pearce, *Collecting in Contemporary Practice*, p. 10.

⁹⁰ Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, p. 67.

⁹¹ Jean Baudrillard, "The System of Collecting," in *The Cultures of Collecting*, ed. John Elsner and Roger Cardinal (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1994), pp. 7-24.

collectivity on an even footing, and in supporting our very project of survival.”⁹² He seeks to analyze the construction and transmission of values in a capitalist society.⁹³

Popular among collecting theorists is the idea that objects are, in the words of Stephen Bann, ‘signs bearing a message’. According to British collecting theorist Susan Pearce: “The broad structural/linguistic tradition has transformed the study of material culture in its suggestion that objects may be viewed as an act of communication, as a ‘language system’ like mythology and literature....”⁹⁴

Mieke Bal, who has written extensively on collecting from a narrative perspective, sees objects as part of a semiotic system which communicates a story with a beginning, a middle, and an end.⁹⁵ Stephan Bann’s book on collecting takes as its subject John Bargrave, a mid-seventeenth-century Kentish gentleman and Vice-Dean of Canterbury Cathedral. Bann makes the case that Bargrave, though an obscure figure, was important to the history of collecting and museums because he was a man devoted to signifying, to making meaning with objects. “Yet each object that he collected was intensely semiophoric: it was a sign bearing a message, as his own written catalogue abundantly testifies. In that sense, he was consistently freeing objects from their ‘utilitarian’ function and constituting them as sign bearers.”⁹⁶ According to Bann, the meanings Bargrave attributed to the objects in his collection were self-referential, and the catalogue he produced was a “scrambled biography”.

One of the most original contributions to collecting theory is Susan Stewart’s book, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*. The longing Stewart refers to is the longing for authentic or unmediated experience. She writes:

Within the development of culture under an exchange economy, the search for authentic experience and, correlatively, the search for the authentic object become critical. As experience is increasingly mediated and

⁹² Jean Baudrillard, “The System of Collecting,” in *The Cultures of Collecting*, ed. John Elsner and Roger Cardinal, p. 7.

⁹³ Susan Pearce, *Collecting in Contemporary Practice*, p. 9.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

⁹⁵ Mieke Bal, “Telling Objects: A Narrative Perspective on Collecting,” in *The Cultures of Collecting*, ed. John Elsner and Roger Cardinal, pp. 97-115.

⁹⁶ Stephen Bann, *Under the Sign. John Bargrave as Collector, Traveler, and Witness*, p. 11.

abstracted, the lived relation of the body to the phenomenological world is replaced by a nostalgic myth of contact and presence. 'Authentic' experience becomes both elusive and allusive as it is placed beyond the horizon of present lived experience, the beyond in which the antique, the pastoral, the exotic, and the other fictive domains are articulated. In this process of distancing, the memory of the body is replaced by the memory of the object, a memory standing outside the self and thus presenting both a surplus and lack of significance. The experience of the object lies outside the body's experience – it is saturated with meanings that will never be fully revealed to us.⁹⁷

Like Bann and others, Stewart is interested in the act of recontextualization. What happens to one's experience of an object when the object is "denatured" or taken out of its original context? Her explanations seem to come closest to approximating an understanding of what motivated McCord to collect. His collection filled no material need, nor was it valuable in a strictly monetary sense. What Stewart suggests is that the need to collect arises out of the insatiable demands of nostalgia.

IV

While I was growing up, my bedroom doubled as my mother's workroom. Her sewing machine, an old Singer, the black enamel finish rubbed bare in places, stood in front of the window. On one side was my bed and on the other her mannequin. On the pink linoleum-tiled floor beneath her workbench lay the scraps of cloth, the stray pins, and the ends of multi-coloured threads, all balled up together, which constituted the remains of her day. There was a tacit understanding between us that I should follow her example and make something useful with these discarded bits and pieces, a doll's dress, or perhaps a hanky. I tried, but I never learned to sew. What amused me and filled me with wonder were the variations in texture, colour and shape of the material. Stitching them together to make a permanent shape held less pleasure than exploring the infinite variety of patterns the uneven bits conjured up. I spent hours as a young child playing with these cloth collages in the shadow of my mother's sewing machine.

⁹⁷ Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*, p. 133.

As she worked, my mother would sometimes tell me stories of her Glasgow childhood. Tightly woven, her stories showed her to be as sparing with words as she was with the expensive material the chauffeurs of her Westmount customers delivered to our flat in Verdun. I was an adult before I realized how much she had left out of her creations. Like her dresses, her stories fitted together perfectly, stitches and transitions invisible, seams and narrative following an unwavering straight line. My mother needed to make things fit. She worked with the intensity of Michelangelo in her search for perfection. She would examine the way the sleeves joined the bodice and if they weren't right she would rip them out. I would observe, long after she had closed her Singer for the day, the same expression, a slight narrowing of the eyes, which indicated her ongoing struggle with finding the right fit.

Finding the right fit is also a preoccupation of historians. Although it is rarely expressed in these terms, we too deal in fragments, the bits of archival material that is the paper remains of a life. How we go about putting these fragments together determines the shape of our historical narratives. In my mother's mind, there existed a perfect fit; so too for the historian trained in scientific methods whose histories purport to be true because based on all the facts. This may have been adequate at the end of the nineteenth century when professional historians were charged with creating definitive histories of nation building. But from where I stand at the beginning of the 21st century, this practice appears dangerously obsolete. It can yield well-designed costumes for a historical persona, at best, but it cannot recreate an individual experience.

The conserving/conservatizing impulse of modern historiography to represent the past 'as it really was', is still alive today in the rituals of archival research. When I first began this project, in true Rankeian fashion, I believed that David McCord's life story lay dormant in the archives waiting for the right historian with sufficient time and sympathy to resurrect it whole on paper. By choosing a subject so rich in sources, I had hoped to avoid the frustrations of re-assembling minute fragments of time from the lives of the deceased. For this historian, who had spent a year and a half painstakingly piecing together a

coherent narrative of wife-abuse from little slivers of experience extracted from some 300 depositions in the judicial archives, the embarrassment of riches in the McCord family archive was dazzling. Seduced by the quality and quantity of the sources, I abandoned working-class drinking culture, my original thesis topic, for the luxury afforded by this very different challenge of committing to paper episodes in the well- documented life of one individual. In my bedazzlement, I failed to see the large gaping holes: despite the richness of the source, there were major lacunae.

Little is known about David McCord's childhood beyond the most general biographical details. Information on his intimate relationships, including with his family and wife, is sketchy. The correspondence with his younger brother Robert Arthur, who died at age 36, was destroyed at David McCord's request because they "evoked memories too painful to be preserved," according to W.D. Lighthall, friend and manager of McCord's estate. His wife's side of a lengthy correspondence, begun during their courtship and resumed when David McCord was a patient at Homewood Sanitarium in Guelph, met a similar fate. A fire that destroyed his office and all his legal records made it difficult to understand his law practice or professional life other than that related to the museum and collecting. Perhaps of more significance to the historical witness, McCord left no personal diaries. In place of a journal, he kept a historical notebook.

The work of the historian is to create context for texts that have been removed from their original time and place and reassembled in an archive. To be able to read them in context, "with other texts among which they belong both chronologically and by self-ascription,"⁹⁸ forms the basis of historical method. But how we read these texts depends on what we bring to the task as individuals. Our personal cultural baggage, our likes and dislikes, acts like a fine mesh filter through which the documents are sifted. "Historians, like the fishes of the sea, regurgitate fragments. Only supernatural power can reassemble fragments so completely that no particle of them is lost, or miraculously empower the part to be whole," warns Carolyn Walker Bynum, a medievalist who has made a career of

piecing together historical narratives from sources that to a nineteenth-century historian would appear remarkably lean.⁹⁹ And yet the promise made by history rooted in late nineteenth-century European scientific discourse, to reproduce the past 'as it really was', still exerts a hold on historians today.¹⁰⁰ In reality, the past of an individual 'as it really was' is a subjective experience and to represent that experience when autobiographical evidence is lacking is a difficult task, one that cannot be accomplished in the confines of standard biographical writing.

History has always been written from the gaps in the historical record. What has changed perhaps is the self-consciousness needed to see these gaps as something more than obstacles to narrative completion.¹⁰¹ What these traces from the archive provide is an outline that in its very lack of completeness may bring us closer to experiencing the 'real' past. Presented with an outline rather than a completed story, I have relied also on the tools of the artist to gain knowledge of McCord's interior life. In an act of emphatic imagining, knowledge of my own subjectivity is what gives me access to his. I am one subject enquiring into the life experience of another. By necessity, my approach is psychological as well as sociological, literary as well as scientific. My representation of McCord's life involves weaving together fact and imagination.

Consensus is growing in the historical community that history is a form of literature; but this awareness has not generally translated into any sustained discussions on the nature of history from the perspective of art practices.¹⁰² I wonder what history would look like if historians consciously set out to bring science and art together in a methodology. How would it change our perceptions of the past? The twentieth century gave birth to a new understanding of art that has been less about *mimesis*, the imitation of reality, and more about the act of

⁹⁸ Carolyn Walker Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York: Zone Books, 1992), p. 23.

⁹⁹ Ibid, p. 14.

¹⁰⁰ See Peter Novick's, *That Noble Dream: The 'Objectivity Question' and the American Historical Profession*.

¹⁰¹ Historian Michael O'Brien addresses the issue of self-awareness in "Of Cats, Historians, and Gardeners," in *The Journal of American History*, June 2002, pp. 52-53.

¹⁰² Exceptions are Hayden White, *The Content of the Form* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987) and Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative, Vol. I*, trans. K. McLaughlin and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984).

creation. For the philosopher Charles Taylor, “artistic creation becomes in some way the paradigm case of the human being, as agent of original self-definition.”¹⁰³ We become ourselves through our acts of creation: “We discover what we have in us to be by becoming that mode of life, by giving expression in our speech and action to what is original in us.”¹⁰⁴ We become ourselves in our interactions with others.

The ways in which things fit together, whether they be individuals, objects, or events, and the patterns of meaning they create, still holds a fascination for me. In this thesis I have taken up the challenge of trying to represent David McCord’s life by employing a methodology inspired by collage.¹⁰⁵ In a practice that mirrors the ways in which collecting works, collage brings together portions of text, image, or material which have been taken out of their original contexts and recontextualized by being placed in a new location and in a new relationship to other items.¹⁰⁶ Collage is commonly understood as a modern art form that unites a variety of materials – pieces of paper, images, cloth – and affixes them to a flat plane.¹⁰⁷ Bringing these items together is a simple process, not unlike archival research, which requires no special training.¹⁰⁸ But collage making, like archival research, is deceptive in its simplicity. Why select this object over another? Why highlight this piece of evidence over others? What motivates our

¹⁰³ Charles Taylor, *The Malaise of Modernity* (Toronto: Anansi, 1991), p. 62.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, p. 61.

¹⁰⁵ Beginning with the Cubist *papiers collés* of 1912-14 made by Picasso, Braque and Gris, collage has played a revolutionary role in modern art practices. Encompassing Dada and surrealist paper collage, variants of collage include the photomontage, the assemblage, the ready-made, and the installation. For a history see D. Waldman, *Collage, Assemblage and the Found Object* (London: Routledge, 1992). For a theoretical treatment of collage see K. Hoffman, ed., *Collage: Critical Views* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1989). Earlier antecedents of collage are the Victorian scrapbook, pasted screens, and patchworks.

¹⁰⁶ The term collage may be a concept new to academic historical writing, but it is a term that is used across many disciplines. See Roger Cardinal, “Collecting and Collage-making: The Case of Kurt Schwitters,” in *The Culture of Collecting*, p 71. Cardinal states “that the collage is in fact a collection – by which I mean a concerted gathering of selected items which manifest themselves as a pattern or set, thereby reconciling their divergent origins within a collective discourse.”

¹⁰⁷ *The Canadian Oxford Dictionary* defines collage as: 1. A. a form of art in which various materials (e.g. photographs, pieces of paper or cloth) are arranged and assembled or glued to a backing. B. a work of art done in this way. 2. a literary, musical, or cinematic work involving the juxtaposition of several genres or elements. 3. a collection of unrelated things.

¹⁰⁸ Honours and M.A. students in history are routinely hired to do archival research for their professors. At the universities I attended in Montreal it was considered a part of the apprenticeship process.

choices? We normally associate colour and texture with the elements of collage art, but archival sources can be as slippery as silk (the McCord archive includes more than a few locks of hair), or as dense as a plank of hardwood (from the deck of the royal yacht used to transport the body of Queen Victoria to her final resting place). Roger Cardinal, author of “Collecting and Collage-making: The Case of Kurt Schwitters” makes the case that: “Whenever we sense that material bits and pieces have been amalgamated by human hand, we cannot but impute an intentionality, and therefore expressivity, to their arrangement.”¹⁰⁹ Historians are selective about the documents they choose. Their selectivity, however, is not only motivated by the ‘objective’ nature of their enterprise – questions asked or hypotheses adopted – but by ‘subjective’ elements – personal biases, likes and dislikes, particular interests, that come together to influence their choices. Inevitably, the selection process is subject to influences that are both psychological as well as abstract. Collage highlights this subjective dimension.

The archive is another kind of collage. It too is made of fragments. Those who routinely keep archives, governments, businesses, universities, and individuals, make choices about the kinds of documents they wish to conserve. Only a small fraction of all records created are kept and even fewer are made available. Archivists Joan Schwartz and Terry Cook write: “Archival choices about how to describe this archival fragment reinforce certain values and impose emphases and viewing orders for the archive. Archival approaches to making records available (or not) again create filters.”¹¹⁰ While I was doing research for this thesis in the McCord Museum archives, I encountered first-hand the subjective nature of archival collections. Beginning with the individual document, one sees that its purpose is not simply to convey historical knowledge, as I was taught to believe, but it also reflects the desires and needs of its creator, in this instance David Ross McCord. The organizational ‘filters’ to which Schwartz and Cook make reference to, also had an important impact on the outcome of my research. The archivist who first organized the collection, Pam Miller, was fired

¹⁰⁹ Roger Cardinal, “Collecting and Collage-making: The Case of Kurt Schwitters,” in *The Culture of Collecting*, p 71.

suddenly while my research was still in progress.¹¹¹ Having organized the archive and having worked there for more than twenty years, Pam Miller knew the collection intimately and was strict about enforcing the regulations applied to access. The archivist who was hired to replace her had little knowledge of the collection and, initially at least, was unfamiliar with the location of some of the documents. Due to my greater familiarity with the collection, I was given access to the reserve to look for sources that, under different circumstances, might have been denied me. This was how I came to discover materials I didn't know existed.

Since the 1980s, postmodern reflections on the archive have raised important questions about the power of archives to shape and direct historical scholarship, collective memory, and national identity.¹¹² Once thought of as passive storehouses for old documents, archives are now acknowledged as "active sites where social power is negotiated, contested, confirmed."¹¹³ Since the mid-nineteenth century, historians practicing the new scientific history have regarded archives as the best source for fact-based histories. Some professional historians still labour under the myth of the scienticity of the archive. Ignoring the many layers of human intervention that shape the archive, these scholars help perpetuate the myth of the archive as neutral repositories for facts. If one accepts the argument of Joan Schwartz, Terry Cook, and others, that archives are socially constructed institutions reflecting the needs of their creators to control what is and will be remembered about the past, then it would seem imperative for users to acknowledge the relations of power that are at their core in the interests of truth-

¹¹⁰ Joan Schwartz and Terry Cook, "Archives, Records, and Power: The Making of Modern Memory," *Archival Science*, Vol. 2, 2002, p. 14.

¹¹¹ It was Pam Miller's dismissal, in the winter of 1996, which inspired Brian Young to write *The Making and Unmaking of a University Museum*. In the opening lines to the preface he explains: "This book results from a failed political struggle in 1996 at the McCord Museum of Canadian History. Decisions made at the museum and condoned by McGill University destroyed people's work, struck at the research role of museums, and disconnected the McCord Museum from its scholarly base in the university." The firing of the archivist, Young feared, was part of a larger process that threatened to sever the museum from its archive, and make university-based research and teaching peripheral to the McCord Museum's mandate. Interestingly, in a book whose genesis is found in a political struggle over access to archives, Young offers no critique of the power dynamics at play in the archive generally.

¹¹² See Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

telling in historical scholarship.¹¹⁴ I am not arguing, of course, that archives are redundant to the history-making process; only that it is important to keep in mind that individual documents, the fragments to which I refer, are as much a reflection of those who created them as they are of some unmitigated historical truth.

The practice of collage, as applied to the history-making process, highlights the fragmented nature of historical evidence. Collage, by pointing to the gaps in evidence, suggests that meaning can be made from these gaps. Collage also explodes the idea of a unified reality, that there is one point of view from which to view the past. It speaks to a complex reality and puts together things that don't have an obvious relationship, and these new juxtapositions can create new meanings. The work of First Nations artist Robert Houle gives us one example of how this technique works, in this case, with visual imagery. Houle, in his piece entitled *Kanata*, took an iconic image from Canada's past, Benjamin West's *The Death of Wolfe*, and radically transformed its meaning by inserting an image of an Indian in the centre of the viewing frame. The West painting appears in black and white while the Indian is in vibrant colour. *Kanata* offers the viewer a powerful critique and validation of the place of First Nations in early Canadian history. The piece was inspired by Houle's grandfather who Houle remembers saying: "When history was made, an Indian was present."¹¹⁵

The process I have followed in writing this thesis has been a circuitous one. Rather than attempt to weave a seamless life-narrative that describes the voyage from womb to tomb, I have tried to bring David Ross McCord to life in a selected number of scenes that are crucial to understanding the man as collector of material artifacts and creator of national history. The places, events and people that I have chosen to highlight constitute the biographical elements that I use to create a portrait of McCord in relation to his achievement of founding a national

¹¹³ Joan Schwartz and Terry Cook, "Archives, Records, and Power: The Making of Modern Memory," p. 1.

¹¹⁴ See issues 2 and 3 of *Archival Science*, ed. Joan Schwartz and Terry Cook. For more about the social construction of documentary evidence see Dorothy Smith, "The Social Construction of Documentary Evidence," *Sociological Inquiry*, Vol. 44, No. 4, pp. 257-267.

¹¹⁵ See "Rethinking History," group exhibition: John Abrams, Stephen Andrews, Robert Houle, Sara Leydon, Edward Poitras, Jane Ash Poitras. Curated by Carol Potedworny, Mercer Gallery, Toronto, www.collections.ic.gc/mercercer/317.html, cited December 12, 2005.

history museum. I do so, however, with some of the neglected strands of his story. I write about grief felt at the passing of close family members, and its influence on his desire to become a collector of Canadiana later in life; his insecurity at finding himself, at age 23, the head of the McCord family after his eldest brother's death; his childlessness; his dementia; and his opportunistic mishandling of the McCord family estate to support his collecting habit. If I am to follow Shoshana Felman's injunction and work to "demolish the deceptive image of history as an abstraction... in which death becomes invisible," the quote that begins this chapter, it seems imperative that this history include what is often left out: the history that is written on the body, the memories that constitute the core of the self and the emotional states that they evoke.

This thesis is built from the fragmentary evidence that is available on McCord as subject: a section of diary, personal correspondence, notes and sketches scribbled on the back of butcher's paper, oil paintings, all objects that make up a life. The following chapters each constitutes an element in a collage that informs a comprehensive but subjective representation of David Ross McCord and his self-making project to create a museum. I employ a narrative structure that is less influenced by chronology than by theme, bringing together key elements to create a picture of a man whose own history-making practices were more evocative of the monk than the military hero he liked to celebrate. In Chapter Two, "Death and Commemoration," I use the diary of John Samuel McCord, David's father, his own personal correspondence, and my own reflections on the death of my father, to make the link between David McCord's grief at the loss of close family members and his subsequent interest in collecting objects from his parents' generation. "Family Romance," continues the theme of family loss and collecting, this time in relation to David McCord's place within the family, how it is abruptly reconfigured by the death of his brother, and David's response to this change. A letter written to an American cousin and two family photo albums, one commissioned by David McCord after the death of his mother are the context for my use of the term 'family romance' to describe David Ross McCord's attempts at elevating his place in the McCord family history. In

Chapter Four, “Remembering Temple Grove,” the Temple Grove of David McCord’s childhood (reconstructed from his father’s diaries) is compared to the Temple Grove which later becomes the site of his first museum. Temple Grove was where memory began for David McCord. It was the private universe of home that helped shape and define him. In the absence of personal diaries, his collection becomes a rich source as a mirror reflecting back the collector’s own inner experience. Chapter Five, “Dilcoosha” recounts David McCord’s struggle to find a public home for his collection. The final chapter, “Performing Memories,” returns to the theme of loss, in this instance the loss of David McCord’s presence at the opening of his museum, and what this loss means to the historian seeking archival evidence of an exhibition that left few traces of its existence. I propose a simulation of an imaginary guided tour with commentary pieced together from notes McCord made on objects appearing in his first exhibition, interwoven with an introduction to the first museum arrangement.

V

I first encountered David Ross McCord in the archives, not an unusual place for two historians to meet. I had gone to the McCord Museum in the fall of 1994, looking for sources for what was then my doctoral thesis “Drinking Culture in Nineteenth-Century Working-Class Montreal. An historian friend who had worked with the McCord family papers lured me there with stories of arcane drinking rituals and the scandalous behaviour of debauched younger sons. He suggested I examine the papers with an eye to using them as the basis for a multi-generational history of alcohol use and abuse in one upper-class family. At first I was unsure about this new direction. My original idea had been to reconstruct the working-class world of Griffintown using alcohol consumption as a point of entry. A common ground soon emerged however. Alcoholism was part of the connection but so too was locale. Money used by David Ross McCord to endow his museum had come from revenues generated by sub-dividing the former lands of two religious communities found in Griffintown that his grandfather had leased.

My first stop was the Brother's-in-law collection – the minutes of a club of wining and dining lawyers and judges – all members of the Montreal Bar. John Samuel McCord, David Ross McCord's father was an enthusiastic participant up until his marriage to Anne Ross, the daughter of David Ross, a wealthy lawyer. Another place I looked was in the papers of Robert Arthur McCord, an officer in the British army, and the youngest brother of David Ross McCord. Robert Arthur had died prematurely at thirty-six from what was rumoured to be an excessive fondness for strong drink. I learned very little about Robert Arthur's drinking habits from his personal correspondence – the archivist later informed me that David Ross McCord had destroyed all of his brother's letters except the ones I had already read – but they did pique my interest in David Ross McCord. After a frustrating day spent trying to find the vaunted cache of materials on familial intoxication, I decided to kill the remaining time before the archives closed with a box of files from David Ross McCord's personal papers. There, much to my amazement, I discovered the threads of a story that would take me almost a decade to unravel, and that in the end would prove to be far more compelling: the story of one man's struggle to invent himself.

I had chosen randomly from the catalogue, not knowing what I was looking for. An archival box labeled Interdiction and Subsequent Correspondence was delivered to my desk and I pulled out the first file having no clue what interdiction meant. After a few minutes of reading the meaning became clear. The first pieces of paper were dated June 1922, eight years before David Ross McCord's death. One was a legal document petitioning the court to have David Ross McCord declared legally incompetent.¹¹⁶ It had been signed by his youngest sister Annie, who by then was the only other surviving McCord, two cousins, his doctor, and William D. Lighthall, a personal friend and close collaborator on the McCord Museum project. At seventy-eight years old, David Ross McCord found himself stripped of his position as the titular head of the McCord family. Lost too was control over his great achievement, the museum and the collection of Canadiana he had spent a lifetime gathering.

¹¹⁶ MCFP, file #3000, Interdiction and Subsequent Correspondence, June 29, 1922.

The legal language in which the interdiction was written cloaked the enormity of the tragedy. David Ross McCord had been diagnosed with arterial sclerosis, a disease which inhibited the free flow of oxygen to the brain, the source of his homicidal dementia.¹¹⁷ In the same file, I found Miss Furlong's typewritten notes to her boss, W.S. Lighthall, David Ross McCord's curator, describing what had taken place at the McCord's over a weekend in August of the same year. She began: "Davie raising Merry H..."¹¹⁸ David Ross McCord was trying to kill his wife.

Later 11:00

Annie phones. Davie has been an absolute madman since Saturday. He beat Mrs. McCord in a most brutal manner on Saturday afternoon and again on Sunday morning at 10 o'clock – in fact it was so bad that two policemen called stating they were informed 'that someone was being murdered'. Mrs. McCord did call 'murder'.

Neighbors all complaining bitterly and state that unless Mr. L [Lighthall] and Dr. P [Pennoyer] do something at once, they will get together and petition the court to have him sent away. Annie leaving today. Davie attacked her this morning. Mrs. McCord had to get between them, and again was knocked about. They sent for Alf the ex-gardener and Mrs. McCord is keeping him in the house. She is terrified now and wants Mr. L to know that something serious must be done at once. Annie states they have been trying to get one of us since Saturday, and have been trying the office again this morning, but got no answer.... She said they could not get help over the week-end. Everyone out of town. The boss will be furious at this.... I don't want Mr. L. to think we neglected them over a weekend.

I'm off to Davie's again. He has been trying to murder his wife again. What a life!!!

Later, 11:40

Mrs. McCord phones and ask for Mr. Will. He has just left for the house with a man-servant. She say 'I have been terribly pounded and am afraid I cannot keep him much longer, he will have to go away'.¹¹⁹

By beginning at the end, I had unwittingly stumbled upon the story that would frame this thesis on museum building. After more than forty years of

¹¹⁷ MCFP, file #3002, Correspondence, Dr. Messereau to W.S. Lighthall, May 15, 1923. "I have examined Mr. McCord and find him suffering from a severe form of dementia with homicidal tendencies."

¹¹⁸ MCFP, file #3001, Correspondence, Miss Furlong, to W.S. Lighthall, August, 14, 1922.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

marriage David Ross McCord had tried to take his wife's life. Why? Was it simply the act of a mad-man or was there more at stake? Was his dementia to blame or had some form of violence always marred their relationship? Why so much rage and why was it directed at the two most important women in his life, his wife and his sister? Was alcohol a factor? Did any of this relate to his project of creating an Indian museum? What did David Ross McCord's traumatic family life have to do, if anything, with his vision of the Canadian past? What connections can be made between a private history characterized by violence and a public history of nation building? These were some of the questions I asked myself while I read through the papers documenting the last decade of his life. These were the questions that would ultimately shape my understanding of the founder of the McCord Museum and his narrative of Canada's past.

My picking a file that contained evidence of wife abuse was a coincidence, or was it? Having worked on this project for almost a decade, I have come to realize there are no coincidences. The subject of my M.A. thesis had been domestic violence in nineteenth-century Montreal. Prior to that I had spent much of my twenties working in a feminist collective which ran a shelter for battered women and children. Then there is my own personal history with violence. When I began my research on drinking culture I hoped I was through with domestic violence. I wanted to be. I chose drinking culture because I wanted to immerse myself in something that was potentially more cheerful. After reading the first few pages however, I was hooked. I wanted to know more about this man's life and what had brought him to such desperate measures in the last decade of his life. In my research into domestic violence I had focused almost exclusively on the stories of women, who constituted 98% of the reported victims. In this instance I was getting an opportunity to delve into the history of an assailant. It was enough to divert me from my original path.

For the next two years, I read everything I could find on David Ross McCord and his museum. It made for depressing reading.¹²⁰ On the surface, the sources provided a history of the McCord Museum, but underneath there was

another story, that of loss, of family intrigue, and broken relationships, the elements from which domestic tragedy not academic history are made. Once again I was made to realize how much is left out of our official accounts of the past. Modern historical narratives are supposed to be redemptive.¹²¹

In the twentieth century they have been used to chart a story of progress. How possible is it then to write about traumatic events, both the individual and collective kind, using the tools of the professional historian? Historian Dominique LaCapra, among others who have written on the Holocaust, have questioned the capacity of traditional historic narrative to address "extremely traumatic events." These events place "a demand on the use of language that many historians (including myself) may be unable to answer."¹²² In the wake of the Holocaust, Theodore Adorno's espousal of the "irrationality of art as the only witness of the irrationality of history," has been the approach adopted by many.¹²³

In the grand narrative of Canadian history, little attention has been paid to the suffering caused to Native Peoples by the new constitutional arrangements that culminated in the creation of Canada. Confederation is still portrayed in our national histories as a benign constitutional process that created no victims. We pride ourselves in having achieved nationhood without following the American and French models of violent revolution. In our refusal to undergo this bloody rite of passage common to so many nation states founded in the nineteenth century, we see a national character that reflects an image of a peace-loving people. With the rise of the Parti Québécois in the 1970s, Quebec nationalism troubled this picture by linking the subjugation of the French-speaking minority in Canada with events where *Les Canadiens* had lost their lives defending their territory. The Conquest, the deportation of the Acadians, and the military defeat and exile of the *Patriotes* after the Rebellions of 1837-38, were historical events which confirmed

¹²⁰ On the challenges facing readers of traumatic narratives see Felman and Laub, pp. 6-7 and 47-56.

¹²¹ See introduction to *History and Memory: Suffering and Art*, ed. Harold Schweizer (London: Bucknell University Press, 1990), p. 9.

¹²² Dominique LaCapra, *Representing the Holocaust: History, Theory, Trauma* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), p. 202.

Quebec nationalists' worst fears about English Canada and its perceived need to subjugate the French Canadian people.

Canada's First Nations, smaller in number and not possessing a state apparatus, have been less effective at conveying their history of forced assimilation. Despite what many Quebec nationalists would argue, the big losers at the Plains of Abraham were not *Les Canadiens*, but Canada's First Nations. One only has to look to the desperate social and economic conditions that prevail today on most Native reserves to see the painful legacy of Canada's nation-building practices. The destruction of Native cultures by European colonization is a secret we keep from ourselves.

Native suffering has not made it into the Canadian history textbooks according to anthropologist Toby Morantz, because Canadian historians have failed to apply a post-colonial reading to the relationship between Native Peoples and the larger Euro-Canadian society.¹²⁴ Speaking at McGill University in the winter of 2003, Morantz described the problem in the following terms:

I would assume that any high school student would be able to associate Africa or India with the term colonialism, even if badly understood, or the United States with at least a violent shoving aside and/or massacre of Indian peoples. How, though, would this same student characterize the seizure of this country? I think he/she would draw a blank, be unable to provide any sort of framework.... I have been unable to find a history of Native Peoples which locates the history within a recognizable common theoretical mode, that evokes a realization of the imbalance of power relations and the resulting subordination.¹²⁵

Government attempts at eliminating the Native presence in Canada did not succeed. Nor did David Ross McCord manage to kill his wife. Yet both have had been silenced through other means. David McCord had all of Letitia Chambers

¹²³ Harold Schweizer, ed., *History and Memory: Suffering and Art*, p. 122. Also see *Social Suffering*, ed. Arthur Kleinman, Veena Das, and Margaret Lock (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

¹²⁴ Toby Morantz may have overstated her case here. In regions of the country outside of central Canada, her argument does not seem to apply. In British Columbia, for instance, there is a rich literature on Native-White contact, some of it written from a post-colonial perspective. See Cole Harris, *Making Native Space: Colonialism, Resistance, and Reserves in British Columbia* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2002).

¹²⁵ Toby Morantz, "Writing Native Peoples' Histories: In Search of an Interpretation," unpublished paper presented at McGill University, Montreal, January 31, 2003.

personal papers destroyed. In so doing he effectively denied her a voice in her own self-representation. In Western culture history has almost exclusively been composed from written records. To be an agent of history one needed to leave a paper trail. Without this record individuals died a second death. Letitia Chambers' life was not without its material traces: a lock of her hair, some poems she wrote and which her husband prized, an ivory miniature from her father, are some of the objects that remain in the McCord collection. By eliminating her written record however, David Ross McCord became free to interpret these objects at will. In the McCord Room of the museum, Letitia Chambers is presented by her husband as the 'proud daughter of the Maunsells', member of the Irish gentry. In this deft use of genealogy, Letitia Chambers was transformed into a suitable companion for the founder of a national museum. Prior to their marriage Letitia Chambers had been the matron of the local smallpox hospital. It was a position that placed her at a severe disadvantage both socially and economically in relation to her fiancé. In private, Letitia Chambers bore the brunt of her husband's insecurities about social class. Letters sent by David McCord to his bride-to-be while she was studying comportment in Toronto were filled with comments and small reproaches about her dress, her writing, and her ability to measure up to his standards of womanhood.

My dearest Letitia

I have much to say to you, in the first place – your letter since last Sunday for example have afforded me much pleasure. They have been characterized by deep Christian feeling and proper thoughts and have been a source of much gratification to me. I would like you to write me a nice affectionate letter every day whether I write you only a line or a longer letter. I am doing all in my power to build up a practice and it often happens that much as I may desire it, it is impossible to write a letter. the closest attention is required to be given to a practice and client's interests must be attended to. I am not neglecting you in any way my practice is for your advantage as well as mine. How I pray to succeed! I trust (with God's Grace) may! The tender feminine expressions of love in some of your letters cheered me so much. They are the next thing to having you near me, I know you value my letters and thanks for this assurance, I feel strong thank God but I have much to contend against. If you will only let me live for you that is all my desires you say – now that is what I love to hear and when you promise to do all that I wish and promise this sweetly, it was most encouraging. "I like that no all of mine will ever give you

pain" – there again is the true womanly note. The position is this. My interests are yours and yours are mine. I have always heard that after a young lady is engaged there is a tranquility of demeanor about her and a calmness she never before experienced, how I wish you to feel this tranquility and calmness and to allow it to prevent you from fretting. Yours is a nature that is much injured by fretting. You are, humanly speaking – only accountable to me. To the remainder of the world you are not. I will shelter and protect you while I live, and have said and will say everything that is sweet and good of you. I trust that God will keep you humble, as I have told you, nothing pleases me as much as praising you and being able to please you. I have the privilege of correcting you and it pleases me so much to think that you are prepared to do as I wish, because you know already, I think, that I will be so tender to you as I knew you will be to me – exact counterparts.

Any imperfection or mistake made by you would fall on me and I would feel it keenly and I know that you would suffer if I suffer. I write and think in this spirit. I will work for you. Now I criticized you closely, with your loving permission the last weeks we were together here, and is as often much pleased with your sweet manners? I can recall a hundred pretty little acts and ways. You were most happy in manner when you were most natural, you may remember that. The many days at M. Fishers I was much pleased with you. Do you think that I would be pleased with you if you were not ladylike, I am of course naturally anxious because circumstances placed you with people below you and you have acquired the use of some expressions which are not elegant, and anyone of them would injure you. (Insert) and I therefore requested you to begin at once to keep a close watch on every word and act, which I know you will do, as it is my wish. The habit of learning is soon acquired when one is in earnest to accomplish anything to please. I am not apprehensive for the future regarding your taking your position whatever may be said to the contrary. I do not intend to say in my family anything more regarding you, I have not done so for some time past. you will please me and that is, humanly speaking, the whole question. I will work for you and protect you with my manhood. I feel that if you really try, you will be a great success. I have placed the whole case with a higher power. Where can I find a woman with a deeper religious feeling or a greater absence of frivolity. That is the reason I always begged you to be high toned – and again how playful I have seen you. I have said much regarding what I wish you to be to me.

Regarding what I wish you to be to others when you meet. I do not wish you to be servile, I would like you to be known and loved by all for your sweetness and gentle ladylike manners. My mother, for example was adored for her gentleness and sweetness, her feminine character – and this is the character I wish you to be. These people who may be pleased to say certain things know if you be, as I have above sketched, they will be the first to say how agreeable you are. Do not allow these things to trouble you for a moment. If with God's grace, I succeed in my profession, that is the whole worldly question. Shall I not write Mrs. Beatty at once. You will

find her a sensible woman. She is not elegant; rather contrary, I might say quite the accident placed us together, I do not know she is the kind of woman who has much _____ with me. Her husband is a sterling fellow and may be a most useful friend to me in a business light. he represents legally a most powerful family connection in Toronto and requested my friendship. I would like to cultivate his acquaintance. Ladies may be sometimes useful to their lovers or husbands by understanding people and being agreeable. People who have their head must cultivate business connections for business sake and keep up with the day, make new connections. You see I am keeping no secrets from you. The sweet intimacy of thought between you and me is another question. My deep secret inner thoughts are reserved for you. I have said nothing lately about your appearance for this reason. It comes from God. I pray that you may be present pretty and young. I delight in your being pretty but I leave this to God. We should not be proud of anything earthly. Are you any fatter? I would like all the little corners filled up – your neck especially. Be careful of your dress and appearance. Not part of your appearance requires as much care as your neck and the way in which your dress is made there, and what you wear at your neck. Remember your appearance is mine. I am glad your bonnet is pretty. It is not easy to find a bonnet to become you. I am going to write to England for another drawing in what shape would it be most useful to you in a locket or how? How large do you wish the locket to be. Please send me the size of the one containing your father's likeness. Did you not say that you nephew could have a photograph taken cheaply of the miniature. I feel this, I do not know really what kind of woman Mrs. Beatty is, and I feel the necessity of dignity in your case from the ground that my sisters have taken. Many people may at first take their side, considering that they are ladies they are a preferable judge of a lady than I can be as a gentleman. Adieu. God bless and protect you and direct you tomorrow at the jail. Affectionately¹²⁶

David Ross McCord tried to work a similar transformation on First Nations. In his room dedicated to 'Our Aborigines', Native Peoples were portrayed as 'noble savages', members of a uniquely Canadian aristocracy of forest and stream. David McCord did not destroy Native records so much as alter their meaning. By neglecting to attribute authorship to any of the Native objects he owned and by disregarding the stories of those who created them, he was free to attach his own meanings. One of the objects included in the original display at the museum (it is discussed at greater length in the chapter "Performing Memories) was a wampum belt that McCord believed depicted the Native

¹²⁶ MCFP, file #1851, Correspondence between DRM and Letitia Chambers, Saturday afternoon, Montreal, June 8, 1878. In the original.

conversion to Christianity. If he had visited Kahnawakhe he would have discovered what every Mohawk in the community would have known, that the “Two Dog” wampum told a very different story about an uneasy alliance between Christians and Indians.¹²⁷ McCord’s knowledge of these objects was usually second hand. His network of informants helping him to amass his collections consisted largely of Indian agents and missionaries.

The eventual triumph of McCord’s vision for a history museum and the Canadian nation-building project that was celebrated within its walls, masked much suffering, both personal and collective. Collections arise out of the desire to appropriate. “[They] are made through a species of colonialism...,” writes Susan Pearce.¹²⁸ The appropriation of another’s objects, identity, and authorship, is a form of theft. There was a cost to what David Ross McCord did. In our Canadian narratives of nation-building, the suffering this caused has been edited out. Domination, whether physical, psychological, or cultural, destroys the possibility of becoming a subject. It eliminates our potential to witness. Oppression turns people into lesser subjects, invisible in the dominant culture. ‘Imagining a Self, Imagining a Nation,’ is about one man’s act of self-creation: David Ross McCord’s museum building project. Another act of self-creation is this thesis.¹²⁹

¹²⁷ See Deer, A. Brian. “Wampum and the Iroquois: A Short Overview,” unpublished paper, Montreal, 2002.

¹²⁸ Susan Pearce, *Collecting in Contemporary Practice* (London: Sage, 1998), p. 169.

¹²⁹ Taylor, *The Malaise of Modernity*, p. 49.

Chapter Two: Death and Commemoration

I don't like funerals...except ceremonial ones. It takes too much out of one's heart.¹

- David Ross McCord

There was a home of gentle peace and loving union. With jealous eye Death looked therein. 'I will disturb that peace', said he, 'I will rupture that union'.²

- E. St. G.S.

I am concerned rather with how we perform our mourning, how we recover from the trauma of loss. I find that the most compelling explanations for the intricate working through of mourning come from psychoanalytic theory. This theory accounts for the affective force of the sexual and psychic remaking that surviving loss entails.³

- Peggy Phelan



Figure 1, McCord Monument, Mount Royal Cemetery, Kathryn Harvey, 1999.

¹ MCFP, file #1201, Correspondence Anne McCord, DRM to Anne and Jane McCord, 1901.

² MCFP, unaccessioned pamphlets, E. St. G.S. *Three Chapters about Lazarus of Bethany* (England: 1876).

It was David who was sent to the Eastern Townships to break the news of Eleanor's illness to his father. How sick was she? No one seemed to know. John Samuel had spent the better part of August with his second daughter Jane, at the St. Catherine Springs spa, where father and daughter had gone for a water cure. In the last week of their stay they were joined by Eleanor, the eldest McCord child, and her husband George Lewis. The couple had only recently returned to Montreal, having spent a year in Europe on their honeymoon. After Labour Day, John Samuel returned to work at the Superior Court in Sweetsburg, Quebec. On September 11th, "David arrived to announce Dear Elly's illness. May God spare her in his mercy," wrote John Samuel.⁴ Father and son stayed on at Sweetsburg waiting for the court to adjourn. "No news from dear Ste. Anne or Stearn Staver. God pray this may be good."⁵ On Sunday, John Samuel and David attended church. The next day they returned to Temple Grove where they had their worst fears confirmed.

John Samuel never names Eleanor's illness.⁶ But whatever the cause was, Eleanor who had just turned twenty-seven and was married just a year, did not linger. A week separated David's announcement and his sister's death. In the days that remained, John Samuel kept a constant vigil at his daughter's bedside, his diary bearing witness to her final days:

16-9-63

Sat for two hours with my dear Elly, found her very weak, and exhausted, this cannot last long, her sufferings are very great. May God support and bless her. She is well prepared for his Kingdom.

17-9-63

dear Elly passed a bad night

³ Peggy Phelan, *Mourning Sex: Performing Public Memories* (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 5.

⁴ MCFP, file #420, John Samuel McCord's diary, September 11, 1863.

⁵ MCFP, file #420, John Samuel McCord's diary, September 12, 1863.

⁶ I was unable to locate the cause of Eleanor Lewis' death. There is no record of her internment at Mount Royal Cemetery. In "Private, Family, and Community Life" in Miller et al., *The McCord Family: A Passionate View* (Montreal: McCord Museum, 1992), p. 79, Brian Young writes that she died in childbirth but the source for this statement is not mentioned.

18-9-63

My beloved Elly departed this life at 11:40 AM on this day. May God comfort me and her poor husband.

19 -9-63

a cold black day, dark within and dark without. Oh Lord give me a resigned mind.

20-9-63

All at home praying together the beautiful service of our church.

21-9-63

Shortly after sunrise, bright, 8 am cloudy. May a Gracious God give us all strength to go through our solemn and painful duty this day.

A dreadful scene, and drive to Mount Royal and the conversation on the way – frightful. Rain from 3 pm. Courtland Freer buried some 30 min[utes] before my child.⁷

Anne Ross and John Samuel McCord both suffered a physical collapse after Eleanor's death. But with his responsibilities as a Superior Court judge still pending, John Samuel was obliged to return to work by the end of the first week of October. With him went David McCord. "Took David with me to restore by recreation his head."⁸ John Samuel never recovered from the loss of Eleanor. A year after her death he was moved to write:

Gloomy day both physically and mentally. this is the first of three awful anniversary days of my dear Elly's sickness unto death, and I can scarcely control my feelings.⁹

The following Sunday, too sick to attend church, John Samuel confides in his diary:

I dare not trust myself to think of this anniversary, and its loss. It would be too much for me and mother, and awful now for the duties of my circuit which I commence tomorrow. But, oh God thou knowest how I mourn.¹⁰

As the eldest child, Eleanor had spent the most time with her father. She was his preferred travelling companion, accompanying John Samuel on business trips to

⁷ MCFP, file #420, John Samuel McCord's diary, September 16-21, 1863.

⁸ MCFP, file #420, John Samuel McCord's diary, October 9, 1863.

⁹ MCFP, file #421, John Samuel McCord's diary, September 16, 1864.

¹⁰ MCFP, file #421, John Samuel McCord's diary, September 18, 1864.

Boston and New York, but more frequently to the Eastern Townships where he presided over the Superior Court. Both father and daughter suffered debilitating attacks of rheumatoid arthritis, which may explain some of the special sympathy that seemed to exist between the two. “[O]ur eldest daughter has been now more than two weeks an invalid, suffering much from remitting fever, slept in her room last night....”¹¹ Despite his strong religious faith, John Samuel’s grief remained unremitting.

Visited the grave of my dear Elly. What a sad preparation for Xmas! but for the dear children left me, I could give way to my grief, and shut myself up in my study, and mourn over the memory of that best of children. But that must not be.¹²

Family occasions, once the source of such pleasure for John Samuel, were now dismal reminders of the permanent loss of his daughter.

Dined with Grandma on her 78th anniversary of her birth. She was in excellent health and spirits. Tylee and his wife, David McCord and his wife and Mrs. R_____, Isabel Ross, Anne and I. Deeply felt the absence of her who would have been too happy on this occasion my dear, dear Elly – God forgive me.¹³

On the anniversary of his youngest daughter’s birth he writes:

My dear Letti’s fifteenth birthday – a good and clever child. God bless her. But two months ago, this day, since we buried our dear Elly. Lewis went to New York on Thursday. All my fond dreams have melted away.¹⁴

John Samuel was sixty-two when his eldest child died, and in poor health. After years of suffering the discomforts of courtrooms that were either too drafty or lacked sufficient ventilation, bad food, and uncomfortable beds, not to mention the rigors of travel in the nineteenth century, John Samuel began to show the physical signs of decline. In addition to the rheumatoid arthritis – he remarked that it always worsened when he approached the island of Montreal – gout, herpes, eczema, and an extremely painful condition which he referred to as ‘the

¹¹ MCFP, file #410, John Samuel McCord diary, April 30, 1848.

¹² MCFP, file #420, John Samuel McCord’s diary, December 23, 1863.

¹³ MCFP, file #420, John Samuel McCord’s diary, December 10, 1863.

¹⁴ MCFP, file #420, JSM, November 20, 1863.

tic', often forced him to take to his bed.¹⁵ Despite the physical discomforts he suffered, the frequent travel demanded by his job, and the prolonged absences from his family, John Samuel rarely complained in his diary. Evangelical Anglicanism strongly encouraged its practitioners to offer their thanks to God on a daily basis. John Samuel, a devout Anglican, did so diligently in the pages of his diary, and what he was most thankful for was his family life at Temple Grove. After Eleanor's death John Samuel took less pleasure in life. His diary attests to a multiplication of bodily aches and pains, but it was the mental anguish which distinguishes these entries from those made prior to his daughter's death.

The pages of John Samuel's diary for the last two years of his life are filled with obituaries. The death of Julia Ross, John Samuel's sister-in-law, in childbirth, evoked the strangest response of all, a sign perhaps that John Samuel's grief at his daughter's passing had gotten the better of him.

[t]here is something very strange in the death of this strong-willed woman. My own opinion from all I can collect is, she sacrificed her child and herself to an over strained or affected modesty. She willed that her child should not be born until the arrival of Mrs. D'Utile from New York, her midwife, and although she could not succeed in doing so, her exertions to suppress nature, injured the child, and she would not allow Dr. Howard to touch her in her labour, or examine her in any way – and most probably thus brought on the fever.¹⁶

It was a damning judgment, entirely lacking in sympathy, but also out of character for a man who never criticized his wife's family, at least not in print. It was not the first time John Samuel had been moved to write about what he considered a woman's aberrant behaviour.

Finished the perusal of a work entitled 'A few days in Athens' being the translation of a Greek ____ by Frances Wright.... The Greek like the English is her own, and a more wicked or profane product never came from the pen of man or woman. It proves the truth of an oft repeated assertion that when women are bad, they are infinitely worse than men.¹⁷

¹⁵ The 'tic' refers to *tic douloureux* or Trigeminal Neuralgia, defined as "an intense paroxysmal neuralgia involving one or more branches of the trigeminal nerve – called *tic douloureux*" by Merriam Webster Online Medical Dictionary, www2.merriam-webster.com/cgi-bin/mwmednlm040205, January 31, 2005.

¹⁶ MCFP, file #421, JSM, February 5, 1864. Punctuation and emphasis in the original.

¹⁷ MCFP, file #410, JSM, June 28, 1849.

In the summer of 1864 he assisted at the removal of the remains of Madame Leblanc from the vault in Montreal's Roman Catholic Cemetery. "A melancholy and painful duty reviving all my own sorrows but a well deserved tribute of respect to Leblanc my best friend."¹⁸ Leblanc had been the family's lawyer for years, acting as the administrator for their properties on the Nazareth Fief. It was to the law firm of Leblanc that David McCord would apprentice to become a lawyer. But the death that probably caused John Samuel the most anguish during this period was the sudden passing of his close friend George Moffatt, a member of his innermost circle. One of the last of the great Montreal merchants, Moffatt had been a close collaborator with John Samuel on the rebuilding of Christ Church Cathedral and other projects related to the creation of Anglican institutions in and around Montreal.¹⁹ Moffatt's death in conjunction with John Samuel's own failing health made him "anxious – fearful of another boil, in the _____ much dreaded journey to Quebec, and my future district here, Moffatt's death. My own personal inconveniences, & make me very low."²⁰

John Samuel's last year as a judge was the most difficult of his career. Beset by grief and by physical challenges he could no longer overcome, and fearing for his job, John Samuel's mental outlook became darker as the months wore on. During one session of the court, boils on his rectum forced him to remain standing throughout. The conditions imposed on winter and spring travellers created their own special hell. The Eastern Townships was a day's journey from Montreal in good weather, but in bad, it could take days. In the mid-nineteenth century, even with the advent of steam-powered locomotives and paddle boats, travel was still an arduous affair, especially in spring when mud made roads impassable and the break-up of the ice left Montrealers stranded on either side of the St. Lawrence River. Travel between courts on roads and rails that were made impassable by snow in winter and by mud in the spring, took a

¹⁸ MCFP, file #421, JSM, July 14, 1864.

¹⁹ For more about George Moffatt see Gerald Tulchinsky, *The River Barons: Montreal Businessmen and the Growth of Industry and Transportation, 1837-1853* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977), p. 76 and p. 108.

strong constitution and a sanguine attitude, both of which John Samuel lacked in the last months of his life.

At Waterloo took stage – drift – bad roads and about 1 am this morning reached Knowlton. Done up. Held court for a couple of hours and next day Mr. _____ drove me down to Cowansville. What a painful drive! My son [John] examined me – threatened with a boil or carbuncle, near the rectum – and for four days suffered extreme pain, and on the 31st it bust favourably – thus laid up on my sofa....²¹

Nearing the end of the 1865 spring session, John Samuel, “suffering from boil and impossibility of getting it perforated...” was desperately in need of rest. “I was in hopes of going in today and returning on Friday evening but no boat down that I know of in time. How flat and unprofitable seem to me all these piddling courts!”²²

On May 16, 1865, back from what would be his last sitting of the Beauharnois court, accompanied by his son David, John Samuel went directly “to bed”. With the exception of a couple of visits to town to attend the meetings of the provincial Anglican Church Synod, John Samuel spent his last month alive with family and friends at Temple Grove. Suffering from what he described as neuralgia, a painful paralysis of the limbs, he spent much of his time drugged and unable to move from his room:

A most distressing daytime, struck down by neuralgia to perfect helplessness, unable to turn in bed or rise without help and without Robert’s aid could not have removed to get my bed made... Robert rubbed my limbs when I returned to bed, and with the assistance of chloroform spent a better time.²³

John Samuel was not the only invalid at Temple Grove in the spring of 1865. His eldest son, John Davidson, was lying dangerously ill with pneumonia. The severity of his illness, coming just two and a half years after the sudden death of Eleanor, was a terrible blow to John Samuel and to the rest of the family. John Samuel wrote: “still suffering... weather very fine if health to enjoy it. John

²⁰ MCFP, file #422, JSM, February 27, 1865. Punctuation and emphasis in the original.

²¹ MCFP, file #422, JSM, January 27, 1865.

²² MCFP, file #422, JSM, May 10, 1865.

²³ MCFP, file #422, JSM, June 21, 1865.

making us very miserable.”²⁴ In the spring of 1864, John Davidson, then twenty-three, had left home for the Eastern Townships to begin his life as a medical doctor and surgeon. Newly graduated from McGill’s medical school, he entered a five-year partnership with Charles Brown of Nelsonville, Quebec. By summer’s end the partnership had dissolved, and John Davidson was bankrupt. His medical practice had only lasted three months, but it was enough time to accumulate a sizable debt that he could not repay. In the winter of 1864, John Davidson spent part of his time in the Eastern Townships attending to his father’s physical complaints. By spring, he was back at Temple Grove, penniless and seriously ill.

...last night alarmed by John’s weakness. I fear he is worse than we think him. I am greatly suffering from my arm. Incessant pain day and night. I am constantly fighting the buzzy phantoms’ and tho human reason absolves me. I see it yet.²⁵

Temple Grove was a deceptively small house by ‘New Town’ standards. Its three-sided Greek temple facade made it much more imposing on the outside than it was within. With five adult children at home, in addition to their parents, and servants, it is safe to say that the interior arrangement of Temple Grove permitted little relief from the sufferings of the sick. Tensions inevitably arose.

My arm gradually improving. John suffering greatly from Hemorrhoids (sic). _____ differing in opinion family discipline lax, ‘peace on Earth, good will to men’ not the text of the day. God forgive us all.²⁶

It was a cruel irony that what John Samuel had originally conceived of as a romantic place of retreat from life’s cares, especially the nineteenth-century preoccupation with contagious diseases, would become the scene of so much illness. In addition to the family’s own troubles, one of their servants, the “faithful Madame Picard”, collapsed in John Davidson’s room from “apoplexy” while going about her work.

My daughter Jane heard a moan, and on going into the room, found her sunk on the floor, with paralysis. She uttered a few words, was lifted on the little bed in the same room and became speechless.²⁷

²⁴ MCFP, file #422, JSM, June 22, 1865.

²⁵ MCFP, file #422, JSM, May 31, 1865.

²⁶ MCFP, file #422, John Samuel McCord’s diary, June 14, 1865.

She died a few days later.

John Samuel's journal runs out on June 24, 1865, four days before his death. He had just turned sixty-four. Did John Samuel know he was dying? If he was aware, his diary gives little indication. On June 22nd he writes: "Brian O'Hara lunched with us, consulted on Gaspé oil spring. Grandma, Lissy, Lewis came up to pass the day."²⁸ Does this sound like a man preparing to die? John Samuel had often prayed for a few more years, "if it pleased God," for the sake of his children. In his last diary entries these prayers are replaced with "may God's will be done."²⁹

II

What do we do when the people dearest to us die?³⁰ It is the question that confronts anyone who allows themselves to love.³¹ "In the beginning you weep....," writes the theologian Belden Lane. "The starting point for many things is grief, at the place where endings seem so absolute. One would think it should be otherwise, but the pain of closing is antecedent to every new opening in our lives."³² What did David McCord do with his grief? Did he weep at the passing of his sister, his father and brother, not to mention an aunt, uncle, and grandmother, all dead within a few short years? Or were male tears already frowned upon?³³ There is no record of David McCord's reaction to these deaths in the archives. The only family death I found mentioned was that of his Uncle Tom, a younger brother of his mother's, who had died in Ottawa in 1901 after a long life.

²⁷ MCFP, file #1003.4, undated notebook, Anne Ross McCord.

²⁸ MCFP, file #422, Diary of John Samuel McCord, June 22, 1865.

²⁹ MCFP, file #422, Diary of John Samuel McCord, June 18, 1865.

³⁰ See John Archer, *The Nature of Grief: The Evolution and Psychology of Reactions to Loss* (London: Routledge, 1999), Colin Murray Parkes, *Bereavement: Studies of Grief in Adult Life* (London: Routledge, 1996), and Clive Seale, *Constructing Death: The Sociology of Dying and Bereavement* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

³¹ Colin Murray Parkes, *Bereavement: Studies of Grief in Adult Life*, see Chapter One: "The Cost of Commitment" for a psychoanalytic approach to grief.

³² Belden Lane, *The Solace of Fierce Landscapes. Explaining Desert and Mountain Spirituality* (New York: Oxford, 1998), p. 25.

³³ See Tom Lutz, *Crying. The Natural and Cultural History of Tears* (New York: Norton, 1999), for an interesting historical perspective of male tears.

Following the funeral which took place at Mount Royal Cemetery, David McCord wrote to his sisters:

...I came home very sad – I don't like funerals (when you are) except ceremonial ones. It takes too much out of ones heart ____ !!!³⁴

Standing amid the graves of his dead relatives, David McCord couldn't help but think of those who had gone before. Part of his sadness, he confided to his sisters, was triggered by association: "How the name called one back."³⁵

What is public knowledge is that David McCord loved to collect to the point of obsession. Was David McCord's compulsion to commemorate, which was played out in the second half of his life, born of the grief he experienced as a teenager? According to Freudian psychoanalysis, the answer is yes. Freud argued that the urge to collect came from a strong personal need to transcend the experience of loss.³⁶ In the context produced by loss, collecting is an expression of mourning, a ritualized form of play that uses things as substitutes for the bodies that are no longer. Much in the same way young children use toys to master their feelings of anguish over separation from parental figures by making them appear and disappear repeatedly and at will, the collector uses objects to dispel his or her anxiety at the passage of time. Jean Baudrillard elaborates on this point when he writes:

...the profound power exerted by collected objects derives not from their singularity not their distinct historicity. It is not because of these that we see the time of the collection as diverging from real time, but rather because the set-up of a collection itself displaces real time. Doubtless, this is the fundamental project of all collecting – to translate real time into the dimensions of a system. Taste, curiosity, prestige, social intercourse, all of these may draw the collector into a wider sphere of relationships (though never going beyond a circle of initiates): yet collecting remains first and foremost, and in the true sense, a pastime. For collecting simply abolishes time. Or rather: by establishing a fixed repertory of temporal references that can be replayed at will, in reverse order if need be, collecting represents the perpetual fresh beginning of a controlled cycle, thanks to

³⁴ MCFP, file #1201, Correspondence Anne McCord, DRM to Anne and Jane McCord, 1901. Punctuation and emphasis in the original.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Werner Muensterberger, *Collecting, An Unruly Passion: Psychological Perspectives* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), p. 3.

which, starting out from any term he chooses and confident of returning to it, man can indulge in the great game of birth and death.... It is this irreversibility, this relentless passage from birth to death, that objects help us to resolve.³⁷

In establishing a collection, the collector attempts (although neurotically) to gain dominion over the passage of time.

In the twentieth century Sigmund Freud was one of the first to theorize about loss and its effects on the human psyche. In his landmark article *Mourning and Melancholia*, written during the First World War, he likened the process the psyche underwent during mourning to a form of economic activity. Freud described successful mourning as a gradual but painful process involving the withdrawal of what he referred to as libido or psychic energy from the original beloved, and its eventual reinvestment in a new love object. He wrote:

Why this compromise by which the command of reality is carried out piecemeal should be so extraordinarily painful is not at all easy to explain in terms of economics. It is remarkable that this painful unpleasure is taken as a matter of course by us. The fact is, however, that when the work of mourning is completed the ego becomes free and uninhibited again.³⁸

Freud's secular approach to death and mourning has exercised an enormous influence on how we have come to perceive this final stage of life.³⁹ The influence of his ideas has been so great that even organized religion has taken a back seat to his interpretations. Although he himself believed that mourning could only be "carried out bit by bit, at great expense of time and cathectic energy,"⁴⁰ when his theories entered the mainstream, what was retained was the idea that the dead were best left behind, and the sooner this was accomplished the better for all concerned. The Victorians who were much more self-consciously Christian in their approach thought otherwise. The accepted doctrine of

³⁷ Jean Baudrillard, "The System of Collecting," in *The Cultures of Collecting*, ed. John Elsner and Roger Cardinal (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1994), p. 16.

³⁸ Sigmund Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," in *Collected Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. ix, ed. James Strachey (London: Hogarth, 1950), p. 253.

³⁹ See John Archer, Chapter Two: "The Historical Background to Grief Research," *The Nature of Grief*, pp. 12-21.

⁴⁰ Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," p. 253.

Anglicanism of the day preached that one day all believers would be reunited with their loved ones in heaven, therefore it was important for Christians to maintain their connection to the dead.

The Victorians believed that ceremonial respect paid to the dead and the bereaved were important components of a good society. Gradually in the 20th century...the astonishing idea took hold that there was something morbid and even antisocial about mourning. The Victorians thought that grief required time, that it involved a slow and stately progression of feelings, which was echoed by the step-by-step resumption of color in women's dress. The modern world differed profoundly: the sooner the mourner returned to society and the more unremarked the loss, the better for everyone.⁴¹

I will elaborate on the influence of Anglicanism on David McCord's response to the deaths in his family and on his subsequent choice to become a collector and museum founder, later in this chapter.

When my father died, I was sixteen and I didn't have a clue how to mourn. Lost was how I felt. He died the day I graduated from high school. It never occurred to my family that I wouldn't attend my graduation, but it was an awful exercise in self-control. The disconnect between what I was feeling and my surroundings was almost total. With the exception of the principal and a couple of friends, no one knew what had happened, and I knew no way of telling them. This was meant to be a happy occasion and so I felt compelled to act accordingly, but in my mind a wall had gone up separating me from my classmates and the rest of the world. My grandfather had died when I was ten, but I knew no one who had lost a parent. I felt profoundly changed, but I showed no outward sign. At least with puberty, there had been blood. Mourning clothes and black crepe armbands had never been more unfashionable than in the 1970s. The public display of mourning in my small Protestant section of the world was restricted to the funeral. Afterwards there was nothing but an absence, no prayers to be said for the dead, no monument to unveil, no feast to attend.

⁴¹ Katherine Ashenburg, *The Mourner's Dance. What We Do When People Die* (Toronto: Macfarlane, Walter & Ross, 2002), p. 145.

Chalmers United Church where my family regularly attended was as bereft of ritual as a church can be and still call itself a church. The congregation had originally been Presbyterian and still retained a Calvinist aversion to anything that appeared vaguely 'Papist': the use of bells, candles, incense, anything that stimulated the senses and by extension sentiment. Funerals rarely took place in church but were held at the local funeral parlour. I have little memory of my father's funeral other than it wasn't very personal. We sang a few hymns and there was a brief eulogy delivered by our minister, and then we left for Mount Royal. By the time we arrived at the crematorium, my father's casket was already sitting on top of a mechanized pyre. With the push of a button, he descended into what must have been the basement of the building but I imagined a blazing inferno. The clanging of the metal doors as they slammed shut over his departing body resonated off the marble walls with a resounding finality.

I envied David McCord's experience of mourning. The Anglican Church to which he and his family belonged, I imagine, at least provided some direction, and the general culture, a map, which prescribed everything from the kind of clothes you were expected to wear, to the amount of time allotted to the task of separating from a loved one. Victorians were responsible for creating one of the most elaborate systems of mourning in the Western world. The main rituals were centred on the private scene of death, attendance at the deathbed, and the public sign of mourning, the funeral procession through the streets ending in burial. Known for their sentimentality and their passion for commemoration, Victorians built extravagant monuments to their dead – Mount Royal Cemetery is one local example – designed to instruct and to edify the living, while communing with the dead. Paying respect to the dead also gave birth to a rich material culture which flourished at all levels of society. On a smaller scale, acts of commemoration took the form of handmade jewelry which incorporated hair of the deceased into their designs, and still-life arrangements set under glass bell jars, both inventions of the Victorians. Many of these objects are still to be found in museum collections

including the McCord museum.⁴² Rich and poor alike were fastidious observers of the various funerary and mourning practices associated with what James Curl has called the 'celebration of death'.⁴³ Death boutiques or *Maisons de Deuil* as they were called in France, provided mourners in Europe and North America with one-stop-shopping where all the accoutrements necessary for Victorian mourning were made available.⁴⁴

In each department of such 'mourning Depositories an attendant' was 'stationed, a sort of living lay figure, dressed in costume suitably assimilated to the bereavement that room' was intended to exemplify; a sort of 'glass of fashion' in which the mourner 'instructed as to the degree of grief' appropriate, 'whether as a new-made widow in her deepest weeds, a bereaved daughter, an affectionate sister, or a complimentary cousin'.⁴⁵

The widespread commercialization of death in the nineteenth century eventually led to a public outcry, especially in England, where middle-class reformers deplored "the extravagance, often ruinous in the case of poor families," associated with funerals. In the annual report of the Mount Royal Cemetery Co. presented by its president John Samuel McCord, to the trustees, the issue of funeral costs was a reoccurring theme.

It is an amiable principle of our nature to desire to honour the memory of those we have loved when living, and this feeling is too often manifested by a lavish expenditure in mourning scarves, bands, &c. Whatever may be our pecuniary means, none of us are willing that others should appear to surpass us in this work of love, – and those who cannot are tempted to compete with those who can afford it, and thereby frequently much pecuniary inconvenience is entailed on the survivors. It behooves, then, the wealthy to show, by a plain and inexpensive display of outer mourning

⁴² Almost all of the objects related to mourning found at the McCord Museum were donated by Annie McCord, David McCord's youngest sister. The list of items include: a pendant (M67); necklace (M929.30); mourning ring of James McGill (M2617); brooch (M9811); ring containing hair (M10559); bracelets (M10560-1); locket (M10562); locket containing hair (M10565); brooch containing portrait of John Samuel McCord (M13599).

⁴³ James Curl, *The Victorian Celebration of Death* (Gloucestershire: Sutton, 2000). Also see Bettina Bradbury, "Widows Negotiate the Law: The First Year of Widowhood in Early-Nineteenth-Century Montreal," *Negotiating Identities in 19th- and 20th-Century Montreal*, ed. Bettina Bradbury and Tamara Myers (Vancouver & Toronto: UBC Press, 2005), pp. 124-131.

⁴⁴ Curl, *The Victorian Celebration of Death*, p. 197.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, p. 196.

for the deceased such an example, as the less affluent may follow without inconvenience.⁴⁶

The funeral itself was often the most costly item, but there were also mourning clothes to purchase, different outfits for different times of the day (if you could afford them) and different stages of mourning; photographs of the dead to be taken; souvenirs of the event for every taste and price range; stationery and cards to be sent. In cost and in the degree of preparation, the nineteenth-century funeral is a much closer cousin to the late twentieth-century wedding than it is to funerals of today. At a time when birth and death were still seen to be so intimately entwined, it is not surprising, except perhaps to our twenty-first century sensibilities, that death should take top billing in the performance of life.

In the nineteenth century an awareness of the proximity of one's own demise was an important condition of a Christian 'good death'. People who appeared unaware of the precariousness of their physical state were reminded by doctors, family members, and friends. In the personal diaries and letters of pre-Civil War Americans, Lewis Saum found that: "[t]ime and again it would be marked as a source of satisfaction that the dying person was 'sensible' of the situation. Among Victorians, 'holy dying' represented the logical finality of 'holy living'."⁴⁷ Submitting to God's will was a central part of the dying process. To be able to face death with the equanimity demanded of a Christian required a conscious awareness of the nearness of one's own end. Long drawn out illnesses – tuberculosis was particularly amenable to this scenario – culminating in the death bed scene was considered the ultimate test of religious faith and offered the greatest possibility for spiritual redemption.⁴⁸ The Anglican Bishop of Montreal, Fulford, writing in his journal in June of 1866 at the time of the passing of John Davidson McCord, the eldest son, makes the same point:

John McCord died this morning after upwards of a years (sic) illness of great suffering. But I hardly ever knew a case where the suffering was

⁴⁶ Mount Royal Cemetery Co., "*Annual Report*," (Montreal: Mount Royal Cemetery, 1854), President John Samuel McCord.

⁴⁷ Lewis Saum, "Death in the Popular Mind of Pre-Civil War America," in *Death in America*, ed. David Stannard (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1975), p. 44.

⁴⁸ *Ibid*, p. 43.

more blessed to the spiritual welfare of the sufferer. This is a great source of comfort to poor Mrs. McCord, who has had her cups overflowing with sorrow, for the last two or three years.⁴⁹

Were John Samuel and his family deprived of 'good death'? Was John Samuel's sudden departure an untimely exit, bereft of the comfort and continuity that the final gathering at the deathbed was intended to provide?⁵⁰ It would seem so. Bishop Fulford's comment that his friend's death occurred "rather suddenly," might explain why there was no record of John Samuel's passing. It is a surprising omission given the Victorian practice of recording, often in some detail, the last hours of loved ones. "To ask and receive the details of a person's death was standard."⁵¹ In the English-speaking world, fictionalized and factual accounts of deathbed scenes were big sellers among the reading public. John Samuel wrote about his daughter's dying in his diary, and David McCord went out of his way to save the account written by Bishop Fulford, of his brother John's death, by recopying it by hand from Church records. The lack of an account describing John Samuel's deathbed scene is doubly strange given what Michelle Perrot writes about the death of the familial patriarch in France during the same period: "Of all the scenes of private life, the death of the father was the most significant, the most charged with meaning and emotion. This was the scene recounted in stories and painted in pictures."⁵² More than the visit to the grave, the visitation of family and friends at the bedside of the dying, was the ritual that defined Victorian death practices for the survivors.

The deathbed scene, a community occasion for friends and family, was the final *mise-en-scène* and the only one directed exclusively by the dying. The quality of the performances varied but what made attendance at these spectacles popular was the opportunity it provided for witnessing first hand how well the

⁴⁹ MCFP, file #1809, Diary of Bishop Fulford, June 10, 1866.

⁵⁰ John Tosh, *A Man's Place* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1998), p. 38.

⁵¹ Lewis Saum, "Death in the Popular Mind," p. 35.

⁵² Michelle Perrot, "Roles and Characters," in *A History of Private Life. From the Fires of Revolution of the Great War*, ed. Michelle Perrot (London: Harvard University Press, 1990), p. 176.

dying accommodated themselves to this final bodily transformation. A calm and untroubled passing was interpreted as a sign of inner grace.

Victorians were notoriously curious about all kinds of natural phenomena, including death. In the nineteenth century, mainstream Christian theology described death as a force for reunification with lost loved ones rather than a source of separation. Death was not to be feared, said their clergy, but Victorians were not always so easily convinced. They also sought out reassurances in the form of final farewells, and from the practice of spiritualism, which came into vogue later in the century, especially in the United States following the Civil War. To witness someone's death was a privilege. Providing comfort and support to the dying was considered a Christian's duty.

My father spent the last three months of his life in a public ward of the Montreal Neurological Institute, surrounded by a dozen men whose brain disorders had made human wrecks of them. The doctors seemed uncertain or unwilling to say what was wrong with my father. He had been operated on for a brain tumor, but it was pneumonia that killed him. In those days it was standard practice to keep patients and their families ignorant of a terminal diagnosis.⁵³ Neither I nor my father knew he was dying. He spent his last night alone in a utility room next to the main ward, where he had been placed because the noise of the hockey playoffs on the television disturbed him. There were no final good-byes, no amends made, no wisdom passed on, not even a dead body to weep over.

Death was omnipresent in the lives of Victorians in ways that, for those of us now living in the developed world, are difficult to imagine. Despite our much larger population, and consequently greater numbers of dead, our obsession with avoiding death at all costs has meant a shunning of those who are closest to dying: the elderly. When my father died in 1973, there was no palliative care, no knowledge or understanding of the special needs and preparations needed for this final stage of life, that a century before people would have taken for granted. Elizabeth Kubler-Ross's revolutionary study of cancer patients, published as *On Death and Dying*, had appeared in 1969, but her plea for a more compassionate

approach had yet to make an impact on the kind of care my father received. Two years after my father died, the Royal Victoria Hospital to which the Montreal Neurological is affiliated, opened the first palliative care facility in Canada.

In the nineteenth century death was less discriminating. It touched every age group, with the very young as likely to die as the very old. Few people reached adulthood without experiencing at least one death in their immediate families. Life expectancy in the 1850s was approximately forty years.⁵⁴ What lowered the age of mortality overall was the high death rate among infants; women who died in childbirth; and epidemics that took the lives of rich and poor, young and old alike (contagious diseases being the great leveller in the nineteenth century). The rich lived the longest, as they do today. Achieving their three score and ten, the Biblical measure for a full life, was not uncommon for wealthy men. In Montreal, mortality rates for the over-crowded working-class districts were almost double those of the 'New Town' where the McCord's lived.⁵⁵ Better housing and nutrition prolonged the lives of the wealthy decades beyond the average, but money alone could not prevent an early death. This is certainly true of the McCord family where two of the adult children, having survived various infant diseases, succumbed to an early death in their twenties. Young adults are not immune to death in our century, but how they die – accidents and suicide being the likely causes – is sudden and often without preparation. The AIDS pandemic of the last twenty years has also been a catalyst for change with respect to our approach to the dying. For the first time since the outbreak of tuberculosis prior to the Second World War, young men in the prime of life were dying from an illness that was characterized by its slow and painful progress, not unlike what John Davidson McCord had experienced in the 1860s.

⁵³ Dr. Balfour Mount, "public lecture," Royal Victoria Hospital, Montreal, November 1998.

⁵⁴ I have no statistics for British North America but in England and the United States the average age of death was around forty, a few years older for people from the upper classes. See Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empire, 1875-1914* (London: Abacus, 1987), p. 193 and Charles Jackson, *Passing. The Vision of Death in America* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1977), p. 61.

⁵⁵ Herbert Brown Ames, *The City Below the Hill* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972), pp. 80-86.

The Victorian preoccupation with death and the dying, and the death culture that it spawned, quickly faded from view after World War I. As attitudes towards death changed in the twentieth century in the West, so too did the landscape most associated with death: the cemetery.⁵⁶ The modern cemetery was designed to be viewed from a distance: favoured was the sweeping unbroken vista that provided few visual incentives for exploration. Individual monuments were placed level to the ground, their size and shape pre-determined by cemetery regulation designed to produce a strict uniformity. The need for watercourses and other easily identifiable landmarks associated with rural cemeteries became expensive extras when visits to the family grave were made redundant by the introduction of 'perpetual care'. When the disposal of human remains along with the whole mourning process became streamlined, so too did the cemetery landscape. "The impulse of modernity has been to emphasize the universal rather than the vernacular, the anonymous instead of the personal, the freedom of uninterrupted space as opposed to the particularity of place."⁵⁷ Although Belden Lane was not referring specifically to cemeteries when he wrote these comments, his words do speak directly to the impetus behind the adjustments made to Mount Royal Cemetery over the past century.

According to historian Brian Young, writing in *Respectable Burial*, superintendent Frank Roy was the person responsible for bringing the modern aesthetic to Mount Royal Cemetery. Initiatives such as the construction of an English garden next to his residence, the laying of grass in the areas surrounding the main gate where previously there had been hay, and the excavation of some of the rocky areas, were all measures designed to soften the rural cemetery look of his predecessors.⁵⁸ The tentative changes to the cemetery landscape brought by Frank Roy, would, under the direction of his son Ormiston Roy (hired to replace his father following the senior Roy's death in 1898), become a fully realized

⁵⁶ For another reading of the cemetery see W. Lloyd Warner, "The City of the Dead," *Death and Identity* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1965), pp. 360-383.

⁵⁷ Lane, *Solace of Fierce Landscapes*, p. 235.

⁵⁸ Brian Young, *Respectable Burial. Montreal's Mount Royal Cemetery* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2003), p. 112.

transmutation of the space in the half-century that followed. Frank Roy was not his son's only influence. A year after becoming superintendent, Ormiston Roy traveled to the annual meeting of the Association of American Cemetery Superintendents where he met the man who would soon become his mentor, Ossian Cole Simonds, superintendent of Chicago's Graceland Cemetery, and a leading proponent of the American lawn cemetery movement.

For the men of Ormiston Roy's generation who came of age during the last years of Victoria's reign, the Queen's preoccupation with the death of her consort, and the prolonged period of mourning that followed, came to symbolize a whole culture's obsession with death. With the dawning of the new century, a preoccupation with this final stage of life seemed backward-looking at best, but was increasingly experienced as morbid by the younger generation.

As American lawn-plan concepts came to the fore in his thinking, Ormiston Roy turned against the unkempt nature, the stark, massive stone and mausoleums that dominated the rural cemetery.... Seeing the large monuments, iron fences, elaborate urns, and lengthy epitaphs as invasive and narcissistic, he used blasting, forest-clearing, and construction technology to create a more secular and park-like setting, one whose vistas would emphasize 'spreading lawns' broken only by well-maintained shrubs and perennial plants and flowers.⁵⁹

By the end of the nineteenth century, the American lawn plan dominated new construction in cemeteries across North America. Behind the success of this aesthetic was disenchantment with the individualism so unabashedly displayed by the oversized stone monuments and family mausoleums found in rural cemeteries. There was a leveling spirit at work in the plans of those implementing the lawn cemetery concept, and in this, Ormiston Roy was no exception. "The cemetery's campaign against neglected lots, and the demolition of ironwork and stone enclosures by owners unwilling to pay for their upkeep – or by the cemetery itself in the case of owners who could not be traced – dates from the first years of Ormiston Roy's superintendancy."⁶⁰ What permanently shifted the balance of power away from the owners of cemetery plots in favour of the cemetery

⁵⁹ Ibid, p. 107.

⁶⁰ Ibid, p. 111.

superintendent was the introduction of perpetual care. Perpetual care made the coherence of the lawn-plan model possible by transferring control of lots from families who owned them outright to the cemetery management who were now entirely responsible for their maintenance. New rules were enacted to restrict the height of monuments and to determine how they were laid out. The large family enclosures, topped by imposing stone memorials to nineteenth-century Montreal's richest and most powerful Protestant families, were now a curiosity from the past.

In a parallel development, as Ormiston Roy's control over the cemetery's day-to-day operations increased, the influence of the president and the board of trustees declined. In the beginning, the relationship between the president and the superintendent had been one of master and servant, albeit a highly regarded servant. Up until and including Ormiston Roy's father, the superintendents at Mount Royal Cemetery had been drawn from the ranks of head gardeners who had honed their craft on the large estates of the landed gentry. Ormiston Roy was the first generation of superintendents at Mount Royal to lay claim to professional status. It was inevitable that Roy and the board of trustees would clash on how the cemetery should be run. One source of tension was the issue of access. Some of the trustees watched the mounting popularity of the cemetery with trepidation. Roy, on the other hand, saw himself as a man of the times and as such was committed to making the cemetery accessible to the most modern of inventions, the automobile.⁶¹ Roy was less enthusiastic about visitors on foot however. Many of the improvements he made in the name of the American lawn plan involved the elimination of footpaths.

Mount Royal Cemetery, as it was originally conceived by its first president, John Samuel McCord, was designed to encourage the peripatetic impulse. Crushed stone footpaths penetrated the landscape of woods, water, undulating hills, and sunlit hilltops, the main topographical features associated with the rural cemetery aesthetic. As an expression of the Romantic Movement's vision of death, the cemetery was to provide a comforting place for visitors to commune with their loved ones. The exposure to the natural beauty of the site was

thought to be morally uplifting. "The rural cemetery was envisioned as an open-air church where nature's hand alone would dominate. ...the cemetery testified to a hopeful love for God and creation....Nature was inherently beautiful, defying dreary churchyards by flowering even there."⁶² A hundred and fifty years later, the truth of John Samuel McCord's assessment, that Mount Royal was "a spot capable of being made one of the most beautiful and finest Cemeteries in America," is still very much in evidence.⁶³

In the nineteenth century the cemetery also acted as an arboretum. Some of the trees still bear the plaques giving their Latin names. The rustic signs that once adorned the avenues, however, have long since disappeared. Sometime in the last century in the name of efficiency, the non-profit corporation that runs the cemetery decided to cut maintenance costs by removing the old signs, the watercourses, and the wooden footbridges that once crisscrossed the natural streams. In this modernist makeover, many of the features associated with rural cemeteries were eliminated. One of the side effects, whether intentional or not, was to make it harder to get around.

Getting lost in the modern cemetery is as much a consequence of our changed attitudes towards death as it is about modifications to the landscape. It was easy to feel inadequate when it came to dealing with loss in the twentieth century when so many of the customary signposts that had guided individual mourners in the past were uprooted and discarded along the way as the century progressed. With the exception of the very devout, mourners in North America were encouraged to grieve privately and with a minimum of fuss. A culture is defined by what it represses, wrote Freud in *Totem and Taboo*. Today we associate the Victorians with sexual prudery, symbolized by the clothing of table legs, but for those of us who came of age during the twentieth century how we

⁶¹ Ibid, p. 121.

⁶² Neil Harris, "The Cemetery Beautiful," in *Passing. The Vision of Death in America*, ed. Charles Jackson, pp. 104-5.

⁶³ John Samuel McCord, Mount Royal Cemetery Company, "Annual Report," (Montreal: Mount Royal Cemetery, 1852).

will be remembered will likely have something to do with our antipathy towards death.⁶⁴

Visitors were encouraged to make the link between burial, commemoration and the garden by the founders of the cemetery, many of whom were on the executive of the Montreal Horticultural Society.⁶⁵ In fact, in the cemetery's first charter, Mount Royal was described as being both a cemetery and a garden.⁶⁶ The cemetery was a place where natural science and theology came together. An appreciation of nature as an expression of God's creation was said to be heightened by a familiarity with the names and characteristics of the plants and trees that were so much a part of the rural cemetery experience. Part park, part church, part art museum, and natural history laboratory, it combined many of the pastimes popular among bourgeois Victorian gentlemen.⁶⁷

From the outset, the rural cemetery movement was about providing places of repose for the living and the dead. The forerunner of our public park system, Mount Royal Cemetery was used much in the same way as the adjacent park is used today. Mountain bikes have replaced the horse-drawn carriages, and joggers sometimes outnumber the walkers, but Mount Royal still attracts picnicking families and couples in search of a bit of privacy.⁶⁸ When Père Lachaise opened its gates in Paris in 1769, it set the standard for rural cemeteries by extending a welcome to the general public alongside the family and friends of those who lay buried there.⁶⁹ "The design of the rural cemeteries itself encouraged tourism. The windy avenues and paths invited leisurely carriage rides and walks...."⁷⁰ Both Mount Auburn in Boston (on which Mount Royal was patterned) and Mount Royal in Montreal, became important tourist destinations in the nineteenth

⁶⁴ Matthew Sweet in *Inventing the Victorians*, disputes this judgment about Victorian sexual mores. See Matthew Sweet, *Inventing the Victorians* (London: Faber and Faber, 2001), p. xii.

⁶⁵ John Samuel McCord was president of both the Mount Royal Cemetery and the Montreal Horticultural Society.

⁶⁶ Young, *Respectable Burial*, p. 19.

⁶⁷ Philippe Ariès, *The Hour of Our Death* (New York: Vintage, 1981), pp. 532-33.

⁶⁸ Katherine Ashenburg, *The Mourner's Dance*, pp. 96-7.

⁶⁹ John Sears, *Sacred Places. American Tourist Attractions in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 100.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

century. A thriving postcard business and the prominent listing of the cemetery in the city guidebooks attest to this fact.⁷¹

The cemetery trustees at Mount Royal saw themselves as providing a place of moral instruction to Montreal's citizens. To this end it was important that the cemetery be open to people of all classes and both genders. The working class especially was thought to benefit from the beauty of the site. There was always a tension however between the need to provide access and what cemetery officials considered appropriate behaviour on the part of visitors. "While they had a clear vision of how the middle-class family would relate to the cemetery," writes Brian Young, "the trustees were always more ambivalent about how to deal with the popular classes, their 'riotous and improper manner', and their tendency towards 'wounding the feelings' of more circumspect visitors."⁷² One solution was to apply a separate set of rules to the Free Ground than those applied to the wealthier sections. In 1887, a special uniformed force was created from cemetery employees to patrol the grounds in search of 'dogs and speeding horses'.⁷³

When I acquired a dog in the 1980s, I became a regular visitor to the cemetery. It was still a beautiful spot, but much less frequented than the rest of the Mountain, and most of the time my dog Cuchulain was free to chase the squirrels unmolested. The rules governing access to the cemetery had changed little since John Samuel McCord's time, but ambivalence about the role of visitors had grown. The 1980s were a period of transition for the cemetery and for its constituency, the English-speaking Protestant community. The rise of Quebec nationalism had placed the anglophone minority on the defensive.⁷⁴ A private security firm patrolled the grounds, discouraging would-be picnickers and the growing number of gay men who used the upper reaches of the cemetery as a cruising ground. Dog-walkers were quickly dispatched if their pets were found

⁷¹ John Langford, *The Stranger's Illustrated Guide to the City of Montreal* (Montreal: C.R. Chisholm, 1868) and *The Traveler's Guide for Montreal and Quebec* (Montreal: 1861).

⁷² Brian Young, *Respectable Burial*, p. 69.

⁷³ *Ibid*, p. 79.

⁷⁴ For a history of the cemetery in the 1980s, see Young's *Respectable Burial*.

without a leash, but this actually represented a loosening of regulations as compared to the nineteenth century when dogs were banned outright.

I encountered a sense of otherworldliness there which I found strangely comforting, much as John Samuel and his fellow trustees had intended it to be. My attitudes towards death were strictly twentieth century, and I found my preference for the cemetery side of the Mountain strange, morbid even. I kept coming back, however, although I was unaware that my predilection for the place had anything to do with grief. I knew no one who went to cemeteries to visit their dead. My father lay buried somewhere under the ground over which I walked, but I had no idea where as my mother had insisted on an unmarked grave when he died.

It took my mother a decade to place a marker where my father lay buried. It took David Ross McCord fifty years to have a monument placed on the site of Judge John Samuel's grave in Mount Royal cemetery.⁷⁵ Presumably there was some kind of marker prior to this, but still, why the delay? I have no real way of knowing, of course, but for a man so committed to commemoration, it seems likely that the timing of the monument was a deliberate choice on David McCord's part, designed to coincide with this, or some other anniversary. According his father a place of honour in the cemetery where he had been its first president was no doubt part of David McCord's plan, but so too was his desire to restore John Samuel McCord and the rest of the McCord family to what he considered was their rightful place in Canadian public memory. Most people's need for commemoration is served by a funeral monument of some kind, but not so in the case of David McCord. It seems more than a coincidence that the building of the monument also coincided with another important project, the making of the McCord National Museum. Both the monument and the museum shared a common goal: perpetuating the family name and creating a national

⁷⁵ The sketch M3960, I001-M9/0-1960 in the McCord Museum archives is of a funerary monument, circa 1867. I was told by the archivist Pam Miller that it was drawn by David McCord. Whether the sketch ever became a monument or whether it was intended to be the McCord family monument, is impossible to confirm.

history. In the first decade of the twentieth century the, future of both the McCord family and the McCord museum appeared shaky.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Montreal was barely recognizable as the walled garrison town where John Samuel had settled with his family as a young boy, a hundred years before. By the 1910s, a building boom, begun in the last decades of the nineteenth century, had utterly transformed Montreal's built environment. Saving the landmarks had initially been David McCord's rallying cry, but by the outbreak of World War I, with McCord now in his seventies, it had been superseded by an obsession with the objects of his father's and grandfather's generations. By 1916, David McCord was having thoughts about his own mortality. Problems with ill health had imparted a sense of urgency to his project of historicizing his North American relatives and the community they helped build. David McCord's fear was, if he should die, who would be left to preserve the memory of John Samuel and the others who had contributed so much to the building of the English Protestant community in Lower Canada? These "men of enlightenment and public spirit," as David McCord described them, represented the links to an earlier generation: "the builders of the first [Anglican] Cathedral on Notre Dame Street and the founders of English Montreal."⁷⁶

Who then would value these objects, these 'links of empire' as David McCord once called them, when he was gone? The McCords were childless. There would be no future generation to maintain the objects and retell the stories these objects conjured up. McCord was already familiar with the indifference of the current crop of leaders in the English community with regard to his museum project. Most were businessmen, many American in origin, who did not share in this history, nor in the passion McCord had for the past. The early decades of the twentieth century revealed a more secular mindset, forward looking, and committed to science as the dominant mode of understanding the world. Nor could David McCord rely on his French Canadian counterparts. The conscription

⁷⁶ Archives of the Anglican Diocese, (AADM) Montreal, Quebec, "The Rev. Edmund Wood. *Fidelis ad finem*," David McCord McCord, Temple Grove, 1907.

crisis had once again stirred up the old French and English antagonisms. This was the context which compelled David McCord to remember.

While writing this thesis, I came to realize much to my chagrin that I was not so different from David McCord, at least when it came to mourning our fathers. McCord was driven by the need to make a connection to a man he never saw enough of, who preferred the company of his daughters to that of his sons, and who turned to his middle son only after the death of his eldest daughter. Grieving loss is one of the human experiences we all share. During David McCord's time, maintaining a connection to a dead family member was expected, more so, it was encouraged by the church to which one belonged. A central teaching of the Christian church, no matter the denomination, was that all believers would be reunited with their loved ones in heaven. A hundred years later I would receive very different instructions. In the interval, Freud would develop his own theory about grief, which in the twentieth century would prove to be more compelling to the contemporary mindset. Freud's emphasis on withdrawing 'libido' or psychic energy from the loved one in order to reinvest anew delivered the opposite message, that of separation.

How we go about expressing our loss depends largely on the society we inhabit, our systems of belief, familial patterns of behaviour, and individual temperament. The rich death culture David McCord inherited provided him with a highly ritualized method for mourning. In reaction, the generation that followed was very critical of the Victorians for what they perceived as their excessive sentimentality and overly prescribed behaviour in the face of death.

The individuals and the set of circumstances that came together to create Mount Royal and the other rural cemeteries of the time have long since disappeared. What remains are the extravagant, over-the-top manifestations of a death culture that helped people achieve a measure of equanimity in the face of death and its aftermath. We may no longer have the stonemasons, or the will for that matter, to spend so much of our time and resources on commemorating the dead, but we are still in need of the psychological comfort these places were designed to provide. Moving with the times, the Mount Royal Cemetery Company

now offers the general public, free-of-charge and in both official languages, guided self-help groups for individuals wanting to come to terms with their grief. It is definitely a more modest approach, but it works. I know. I have been there. And depending on the group, you might come away with your own hand-made *memento mori*.⁷⁷

III

The McCord family monument is a place I often visit. It is only a five-minute walk from where my father now lies buried. Entering from the main gate, I pass under the Gothic portico made from ashlar and topped with twin towers. Built in 1862, five years before Confederation, the stone work is carved with symbols representing Montreal's 'founding peoples': the fleur-de-lys of the French, the English rose, the Irish shamrock, and the Scottish thistle.⁷⁸ From the main entrance the path winds gently around the stone monuments, moving off in many different directions into avenues named for the trees that grow nearby. As one walks in the direction of Lilac Knoll, once the highest point in the cemetery, the left fork leads to the section where Montreal's nineteenth-century Protestant and Anglican elite lie buried.⁷⁹ There, atop a thyme and grass covered knoll, is the red sandstone altar marking the final resting place of Eleanor Elizabeth, John Samuel, and John Davidson McCord.

On the lid of the altar tomb, inscribed in raised letters, is the Latin *Resurgam*, which can be translated as 'we will rise again'. Chosen by David McCord during the First World War when he was still in the process of trying to convince McGill to provide a museum for his collection, the epigraph speaks not only to a Christian belief in a spiritual afterlife but to a more earthly preoccupation with commemoration. The epitaph, *Resurgam*, can also be read as

⁷⁷ Clive Seale, *Constructing Death*, see Chapter Nine: "Grief and resurrective practices," pp. 193-205.

⁷⁸ The architect was J.C. Hopkins who also designed the St. James Club on Dorchester St., the Merchants' Bank, and Windsor Hall. Information about the entrance is taken from brochures prepared by the Mount Royal Cemetery Company for the public. See Andrew Collard, *The Montreal Gazette*, November 7, 1978.

⁷⁹ Young, *Respectable Burial*, p. 41.

an expression of David McCord's belief in the concomitance of his place in heaven and in history. David McCord brought a pre-Freudian sensibility to the issues surrounding death.

In Christian theology, the Resurrection refers to the rising of Christ from the dead on the third day. It can also refer to the belief in the Day of Judgment, Christ's second coming when on the last day, all 'men' will rise from the dead.

[H]e will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away.⁸⁰

In the nineteenth century, the accepted Christian doctrine would have been to take the idea of bodily resurrection literally. It was why cremation was forbidden to Catholics and why individuals had to be buried with their families.

This... is one of the pleasantest thoughts connected with rural cemeteries that provision is made that those whom affection and sympathy grouped together in life may sleep in a family group in death. Delightful, yet affecting, is it to look upon the graves of a household, all within the same small enclosure, awaiting together the morning of the resurrection.⁸¹

At the end of time, on Judgment Day, the book of *Revelations* promised all mortal remains would come back to life. Purged of the consequence of The Fall – sin – Christians would be returned to 'life everlasting' in the prime of life, embodying at the last, the Platonic ideal of perfection.

My childhood and early adolescence was spent in the United Church which affected a more rational approach to Christian belief, emphasizing the metaphoric implications of resurrection over the real. Nor were we frequent readers of the book of *Revelation* where the events of the Second Coming are described. Perhaps it explains why I had such difficulty making sense of David McCord's actions in the fall of 1866, when he went to supervise the removal of his grandparents Sarah and Thomas McCord and great-grandfather John McCord's remains to Mount Royal Cemetery.⁸² It was not the exhumations themselves that disturbed me, but

⁸⁰ Rev. 22:4, *New Oxford Annotated Bible (NOB)*.

⁸¹ Quoted from the *Christian Review* in Sear's, *Sacred Places*, p. 108.

⁸² Prior to their removal to Mount Royal Cemetery, David McCord's grandparents remains were buried in the Protestant Cemetery on Dorchester Street.

David McCord's intimacy with his ancestors' bones. At one point, he bends down to pick up his great-grandfather's skull to examine the teeth. He wasn't alone in this activity; both his sisters Jane and Annie (who was only nineteen at the time) were present. As a nineteenth-century Anglican, David McCord's actions were wholly consistent with his religious beliefs, but to my Protestant sensibilities they only appeared gruesome. David McCord wrote the description of the disinterments that follows in July of 1867, but the actual event took place in the fall of 1866. Accompanying the text were sketches indicating where the bodies were found and a description of the tombstones.

This box was very decayed, and was either in pieces when found, or fell to pieces when the air was introduced. This contained the remains of John McCord of Gaspé. The remains consisted of boxes, and the remains must have been in this state when they were placed in Box, they were not much decayed. Some were decayed others were not. the thigh-bones gave evidence of a man of tall stature. The skull, without the lower jaw, was seen by Jane, Annie and me. I had it in my hand. I think all the teeth in the upper jaw were present, and I knew that all that were present were quite undecayed, and none showed evidence of having been defiled. of the monument only three of the four side slabs were present. One was blank and bore the inscription of Thomas McCord, one Sarah Soloman. No age assigned her and the fourth was absent. I found that they bore the inscription of T McCord with some difficulty, we ____ being near the monument.... We [explored] the full limits of our Lot or our ____ Lots as Sprigings said we had. He has executed this on reference to the plan of the ground in the hands of the present company (Mr. Turner?)

We also probed carefully with thin [metal] bar in all directions. We did our duty carefully. We also made excavations at the corner of the chapel as indicated by the family Bible. We found no coffins or pieces of any plates recording any McCord. We found, however, coffins or pieces of coffins and a plate or two with other names on them. We were also careful and did our duty.... These pieces of old monument I intend using for the foundations of the new. We removed them to the Mount Royal Cemetery.⁸³

By gathering together his ancestor's remains in preparation for their final resurrection on Judgment Day, David McCord was acting from the spiritual

⁸³ MCFP, file # 1808, Burial and misc., David McCord, July 23, 1867. Punctuation and emphasis in the original.

beliefs of his Anglican faith. The final words of the *Apostles' Creed* to which he subscribed read as follows:

I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. AMEN.⁸⁴

His actions on this day also foreshadowed his later obsession with collecting. The gesture of bringing together his relatives in death is not unlike the activity of the collector: the gathering together of objects in anticipation of their eventual reassembly in a coherent whole.⁸⁵

Much of what Anglo-Catholics did in the nineteenth century was also motivated by the dramatic reenactment of the Communion of the Saints.⁸⁶ Saints are all those who “keep the commandments of God and hold fast to the faith of Jesus.”⁸⁷ For Anglo-Catholics practicing at St. John the Evangelist at the turn of the twentieth century, ‘saints’ was used as a term to describe all Christians, living, dead, and those yet to be born.⁸⁸ Through the celebration of the Eucharist, Christians were encouraged to remember Christ’s sacrifice, “do this in memory of

⁸⁴ Each service would have contained the recital of the *Apostles' Creed* to entrench the resurrection as an embodied reality to come. ‘catholic’ here means universal, not Roman Catholic. The *Apostles' Creed* is by no means particular to Anglicanism; originating in the 2nd century, it is recited in Roman Catholic, Anglican and many Protestant churches.

⁸⁵ In Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians he writes: “For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ, 12:12. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit 12:13. For the body is not one member but many, 12:14. If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body, 12:15? That there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another, 12:25. And whether one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it, 12:26. Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular,” 12:17. *The Holy Bible*, King James version, (Cleveland and New York: no date).

⁸⁶ Belief in “the communion of saints” is officially part of the doctrine of all churches that include the *Apostles' Creed* in their liturgy. It is therefore part of Anglican doctrine, not specific to Anglo-Catholics (and also part of the doctrine of Roman Catholics, Lutherans, and other churches that use the *Apostles' Creed*.)

⁸⁷ Rev. 14:12, *NOB*.

⁸⁸ “Personal communications, Bruce Russell, art historian, and curator of objects for the Anglican Diocese of Montreal, Montreal, September 11, 2002.”

me,” and to remember all those who had chosen Christ’s path. In the ritual consumption of the bread and wine, symbols of Jesus’ flesh and blood, all generations past, present and future, were reunited in this act of commemoration. It was an idea that held great appeal for people, especially in the nineteenth century, when the death of family members was a frequent occurrence. No one was ever lost when they could always be found in Christ. In the act of the Eucharist, David’s family was always with him even if they were dead.

David McCord’s museum project was in a sense a secularization of this idea. For Anglo-Catholics, the problem was that most of the Protestant Church had forgotten about the transhistorical nature of sacramental life. Anglo-Catholics took it upon themselves to remind them. In David McCord’s museum, the objects of Empire were substitutes for the sacraments: just as the sacraments united Christians with believers from past, present, and future, the historical relics were meant to connect Canadians to their forerunners, the pioneers (the French, but especially English colonials in North America) whose past achievements paved the way for future glory. It was through the interaction with these *memento mori* that visitors were inspired to identify with something larger than them, to experience the transcendent through their membership in the British Empire. What history taught was that people lived on the edge of a knife: on one side the past, on the other, the future, and the present hardly mattered at all. In Europe, people were surrounded by objects that reminded them of the passage of time, of those who had gone before, and the contributions they had made. Canada was a new country however, lacking in the traditional historical markers. What was needed was someone to invent them using local examples like Tecumseh’s war bonnet, or Wolfe’s paint box. Such was the nature of what David McCord took to be his task.

McCord’s choice of altar tomb carried with it a strong message. The monument’s form, perpendicular Gothic, links it to the Cambridge Ecclesiological Society, the promoters of Gothic revival in the mid-nineteenth-century English Church, and in turn to early Anglo-Catholicism. It was a choice consistent with

David McCord's attachment to Father Wood and to St. John the Evangelist, Montreal's first Anglo-Catholic parish, over which Father Wood presided. The Ecclesiological Society was founded in the 1840s to encourage "the practical study of ceremonial, or the arrangement of churches, their furniture, and ornaments, in accordance with the Book of Common Prayer."⁸⁹ A product of the religious revival instituted by the Oxford movement, the Ecclesiological Society was one of many groups that encouraged Anglicans to look backward to pre-Reformation England for renewal in their customs, architecture, and liturgical fashion.

The altar tomb has a long history in Christianity. During the Imperial persecutions, the early Christian community held their worship in the catacombs where it became normal practice to celebrate the Eucharist over the grave of someone who had been martyred for their belief.⁹⁰ In the book of *Revelation*, John breaks open seven seals affixed to a scroll in which are written the events to come in the last days of the world. Each seal revealed a different vision. "When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slaughtered for the word of God and for the testimony they had given."⁹¹ The Revelation of the Fifth Seal was used to support the practice of building tombs over the bones of martyred Christians. After Christianity became legal, churches were often built over the tombs of famous martyrs.⁹² Later, they became gathering places for prominent men and women, who believed that proximity to the martyrs' bones would facilitate the transmission of the sanctification promised by doctrine to martyrs.

Anglo-Catholics never went as far as burying relics beneath their altars, although the more radical among them would have liked to, but the early Tractarian emphasis on the celebration of the Eucharist and the doctrine of the Real Presence meant that the altar and all that surrounded it took on a heightened

⁸⁹ John Moorman, *A History of The Church in England* (London: Adam and Charles Black 1953), p. 397.

⁹⁰ Margaret Visser, *The Geometry of Love* (Toronto: Harper-Flamingo, 2000), p. 87.

⁹¹ *NOB*, Rev. 6:9.

⁹² Visser, *The Geometry of Love*, pp. 87-88.

importance.⁹³ This inevitably led to a desire not only for more frequent celebrations of the Holy Communion but also to the wish to surround the altar with all that was bright and glorious, and to conduct the service with greater ceremonial.⁹⁴

Anglo-Catholics, and the Romantic Movement in general, idealized the Middle Ages. It was from the pre-reformation Church that the early Tractarians drew their inspiration for the liturgical changes that later, as Anglo-Catholics, would make them so visually distinct in their forms of worship from their Evangelical brethren in the Anglican Church.

It is likely David McCord's parents were Tractarians or at least sympathetic to the Tractarian cause. Tractarian books bearing the Ross-McCord inscription can be found in the Anglican section of McGill library. But more revealing of John Samuel's sympathies was his gesture, as president of the Protestant burial grounds, of providing Father Wood with a building and a name for the first Anglo-Catholic parish in Canada. St. John the Evangelist found its first home in the mortuary chapel or the 'chapel of ease' as it was called, of the 'Old Protestant Burial Grounds' on Dorchester Street. Father Wood had wanted to name his church after St. Saviour's in Leeds, built by Dr. Pusey, one of the early Tractarian leaders.⁹⁵

It was feared that the name and all that it was associated with, would raise the ire of anti-ritualists among the Anglican population in Montreal. John Samuel cautioned against the name, suggesting the more neutral St. John the Evangelist instead. In the eulogy given by David McCord at Father Edmund Wood's funeral in 1909, he tells the story of his father's involvement in Wood's ministry in Montreal, and how he came to name what became St. John the Evangelist Church.

⁹³ According to the Rev. Keith Schmidt, present rector at St. John the Evangelist, placing relics beneath the altar would have been consistent with Anglo-Catholic beliefs of the late nineteenth century. What prevented them in part from doing so was that Anglicans lacked Saints and Martyrs. They had no mechanism for creating Saints, unlike the Roman Catholics and Orthodox who canonized. "Personal communication, Rev. Keith Schmidt, Montreal, November 29, 2003."

⁹⁴ John Moorman, *A History of The Church in England*, p. 368.

⁹⁵ AADM, *Centenary Book of the Parish of St. John The Evangelist Montreal 1861-1961* (Montreal: 1961), p. 3.

Such work was sure to be blessed, and in two years a larger church was wanted. A name was also to be found. Mr. Wood had two in view, and he talked it over with my father – his, so to speak, patron – and they were abandoned. My father said ‘No. The bright beams of light have heretofore fallen on you – let them continue – take the name I always give to churches when I can – my patronymic, St. John the Evangelist’. And so it was and is.⁹⁶

It would appear both father and son shared a strong desire to write themselves and their family into history – John Samuel, by giving his ‘patronymic’ to a church (or several churches), and David Ross McCord, through the museum.

The Rev. Edmund Wood, founder of St. John the Evangelist, arrived in Montreal from England in 1849. His first position was that of junior assistant in the Cathedral where he was assigned to work among the poor and to direct the choir.⁹⁷ He quickly fell in with the Bishop of Montreal, Fulford, and John Samuel McCord and got on equally well with the choir boys under his direction, but it was with the other clergy who objected to his High Church ways that he ran into difficulties. The situation became so disagreeable to Wood that he seriously thought about returning to England, but at the last moment Bishop Fulford, who was also sympathetic to the Tractarian cause, intervened with an offer to run a mission out of the mortuary chapel in the Protestant Burial Grounds. According to David McCord, his father had approached his colleagues with the idea and they had responded with “By all means, Judge McCord, put your young friend into it for the purposes of Divine Worship for the Church of England.”⁹⁸ So began the history of the first Anglo-Catholic parish in Canada, and Wood’s long association with the McCord family. A year after coming to Montreal, Judge McCord, then Chancellor at Bishop’s College in Lennoxville, gave Wood a Master’s degree, and Fulford made him a full priest.

Less is known about David McCord’s relationship to Father Wood. The only documents that remain are a single letter from Father Wood and McCord’s eulogy. Both documents attest to a strong and abiding affection between the two

⁹⁶ AADM, “The Rev. Edmund Wood. *Fidelis ad finem*.” Eulogy delivered at his funeral by DRM.

⁹⁷ AADM, *Centenary Book*, “The Rev. Edmund Wood, Foundation of the Parish, and the First Rectorate”, pp. 1-12.

men. The documents hint, I believe, at a passionate friendship. David McCord was fourteen when he first met Wood who was twice his age at the time of their meeting. Wood was a tall, handsome man, athletically built, whose acts of generosity and kindness were legendary in their community.⁹⁹ It is not difficult to imagine David McCord being deeply impressed by Wood and by his youthful escapade of climbing to the top of the steeple of the new Cathedral, some 224 feet, to place an iron cross.¹⁰⁰

Anglicanism was the religion of the establishment in Canada. The McCords attended Christ Church Cathedral in Montreal with the Colonels of the regiment and the Governor General, and on occasion, members of the Royal Family. The Congregation tended to be made up of recent immigrants from England and Anglicans from Ireland. At St. John's a number of famous British officers and their wives participated in services. A partial list included: "Col. Garnet Wolseley, (a sidesman – later Viscount and Commander-in-Chief of the British Army; Major-Gen. Sir Fenwick Williams, hero of Kars; Lieut. – Gen. Sir Charles Windham (appointed governor of Nova Scotia in 1865); Col. Montcrieff and Surgeon J.B. Baker of the Scots Fusiliers Guards (both choristers); Lord and Lady Monck and Mrs. Godley also attended. (In 1867 Lord Monck became the first Governor-General of the new Dominion of Canada).¹⁰¹ As citizens of the British Empire they saw themselves as guardians of the social and political order staking out the higher ground both culturally and morally.

According to the Rev. Keith Schmidt, minister at St. John the Evangelist, "the large Catholic population in Montreal meant that Anglicans tended to be more evangelical in Montreal than in Toronto."¹⁰² Rosalyn Trigger, in her Ph.D.

⁹⁸ AADM, "The Rev: Edmund Wood. *Fidelis ad finem*." Eulogy delivered at his funeral by DRM.

⁹⁹ Centenary Book of the Parish of St. John The Evangelist Montreal 1861-1961 (Montreal: 1961), p. 11.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid, p. 4.

¹⁰² "Personal communication, Rev. Keith Schmidt, November 29, 2003." Rosalyn Trigger, "God's Mobile Mansions: Protestant Church Relocation and Extension in Montreal, 1850-1914," Ph.D. Geography, McGill University, 2004, pp. 24-25. Richard Vaudry makes the same point in *Anglicans and the Atlantic World: High Churchmen, Evangelicals, and the Quebec Connection* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's Press, 2003), pp. 165-167. Also see Jane Greenlaw, "Choix pratiques et choix des pratiques le non-conformisme protestant à Montréal (1825-1842),

thesis “God’s Mobile Mansions: Protestant Church Relocation and Extension in Montreal, 1850-1914,” makes a similar point.

...the more radical and emotional strain of evangelicalism were relatively weak in Montreal. While not all of Montreal’s Anglicans and Presbyterians considered themselves evangelicals, many did. It seems likely that the large segment of the Protestant community that was made up of these two groups (70 percent) ensured that a rather accommodating and ‘respectable’ form of evangelicalism prevailed. The lack of zeal for a militant Protestantism should not be therefore be interpreted as signifying the weakness of evangelical Protestantism in Montreal, but instead reflected the denominational and class composition of the community.¹⁰³

By mid-century, the ultramontane revival had begun to make important inroads into Lower Canadian society. “From this point onward, Lower Canadian Catholicism exuded a self-confident aggressiveness,” writes historian Richard Vaudry.¹⁰⁴ Some Lower Canadian Anglicans responded with their own brand of religious activism. In October 1874, The Evangelical Alliance, an international organization of evangelicals, held their annual meeting in Montreal. Two of the principle organizers were Dr. William Dawson, principal of McGill University and Rev. Dean Bond, Anglican archbishop of Montreal.¹⁰⁵

One way of understanding David McCord’s Anglo-Catholicism is as a revolt, not against his parents’ generation, but against the dominant ethos of material progress as personified by the denizens of the ‘Golden Square Mile’. Anglicanism was already losing ground in the nineteenth century to the Methodists, Congregationalists, and Presbyterians, the Protestant denominations that Montreal’s new economic elite tended to embrace. Anglo-Catholicism offered the fashionable (or aspirants to that description) a mode of religious expression

RHAF, Vol. 46, No. 1, éte 1992, pp. 91-113. *The Montreal Daily Witness*, “Evangelical Alliance,” October 1874, pp. 1-7.

¹⁰³ Rosalyn Trigger, “God’s Mobile Mansions: Protestant Church Relocation and Extension in Montreal, 1850-1914,” Ph.D. Geography, McGill University, 2004, pp. 24-25. Trigger cites Grayson Carter, *Anglican Evangelicals: Protestant Secessions from the Via Media, c. 1800-1850* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 62-63. He argues that the evangelical wing of Anglicanism tended to be strongest in places where there was a significant Roman Catholic presence such as Ireland and Liverpool.

¹⁰⁴ Richard Vaudry, *Anglicans and the Atlantic World: High Churchmen, Evangelicals, and the Quebec Connection*, p. 166.

associated with the avant-garde of culture and taste, one that distinguished them from stuffy, vulgar, pushing persons of the rising commercial classes....

Politically, a few Anglo-Catholics flirted with socialism and most inclined to a sort of neo-feudalism: in either case the ideal was a society in which 'trade' was subordinate.¹⁰⁶

What was at stake was not only numbers, but also whose cultural authority would ultimately prevail: that of the new business class who were associated with American commercial values, or the old ruling class whose identity was synonymous with 'Rule Britannia'. In *No Place of Grace*, Lears argues that Anglo-Catholicism was another form of anti-modernism.¹⁰⁷ At St. John the Evangelist it took on an anti-establishment bent.¹⁰⁸ St. John was the first 'free' church in Lower Canada which meant that no fee was charged for attending. "In order that no question of pew rents might ever turn up, the Chapel was furnished with chairs. Some critics of St. John's referred to it as 'the church with the kitchen chairs'." ¹⁰⁹ What Anglo-Catholics felt they possessed, and what the moneyed classes could only aspire to, was a superior culture rooted in English traditions.

The Romantic Movement had had an important impact on religious sensibility in the nineteenth century with its emphasis on 'feeling' and its idealization of the Middle Ages.¹¹⁰ In reaction to the rationalism of the eighteenth century, Romanticism assiduously cultivated the senses as a means to accessing the imagination. When Tractarianism became Anglo-Catholicism in the 1850s and 1860s, it placed a strong emphasis on the visual aspect of liturgical learning. The introduction of the Eastward position, candles, richly embroidered Eucharist vestments, and even incense, were seen as effective ways of reaching the

¹⁰⁵ *The Montreal Daily Witness*, "Evangelical Alliance," October 1874, pp. 1-7.

¹⁰⁶ John Shelton Reed, *Glorious Battle. The Cultural Politics of Victorian Anglo-Catholicism* (Nashville & London: Vanderbilt University Press, 1989), p. xxiii.

¹⁰⁷ T.J. Jackson Lears, "The Religion of Beauty: Catholic Forms and American Consciousness," in *No Place of Grace*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981), pp. 184-203.

¹⁰⁸ "Personal communication, Rev. Keith Schmidt, Nov. 29, 2003."

¹⁰⁹ *Centenary Book of the Parish of St. John The Evangelist Montreal, 1861- 1961*, (Montreal: 1961), p. 3.

¹¹⁰ Perry Butler, "From the Early Eighteenth Century to the Present Day," *The Study of Anglicanism*, ed. Stephen Sykes & John Booty (London: SPCK/Fortress Press 1988), p. 42.

unlettered, but they also appealed to individuals with a strongly developed aesthetic sense.¹¹¹ What set Anglo-Catholics apart from Low Church brethren was their attachment to Catholic forms and rituals.

To be an Anglo-Catholic at the turn of the century in Montreal was an exotic taste.¹¹² St. John the Evangelist, situated as it was in the middle of Montreal's immigrant district, and on the edge of the 'Golden Square Mile', was one of the most culturally diverse parishes in Montreal, attracting both the establishment matron and the sweatshop immigrant.¹¹³ What they had in common was a desire to partake in worship that emphasized experiential forms of piety.¹¹⁴ Attending mass was a celebration of the senses, marked by the vivid colours, the medieval costumes, incense, and the music, which was designed to transport the listener to a near mystical state. Writing about Anglo-Catholicism south of the border, the historian John Shelton Reed notes that as a religious practice it proved especially attractive to women, artists, and effeminate young men.¹¹⁵ St. John the Evangelist attracted its share of artists including the painter Robert Harris and the poet and McGill law professor, F.R. Scott.¹¹⁶

Another artist associated with St. John the Evangelist was the sculptor Robert Reid. It was Reid who executed a number of designs for the Church including a polychrome marble rood screen, and the carvings on the Baptismal Font.¹¹⁷ Primarily an architectural sculptor, he worked extensively in the Golden

¹¹¹ The Eastward position refers to the placement of the altar in the path of the rising sun. It also refers to the position of the clergy; facing the altar with their backs to worshippers.

¹¹² In my interview with Rev. Keith Schmidt, the word exotic was the term he used to describe early twentieth-century Anglo-Catholicism. Interviewed November 29, 2003. Also see Reed, *Glorious Battle*.

¹¹³ See Jean-Claude Robert, *Atlas historique de Montréal* (Montréal: Libre Expression, 1994), pp. 124, 126-129.

¹¹⁴ William Katerberg, *Modernity and the Dilemma of North American Anglican Identities, 1880-1950*, p. 13.

¹¹⁵ Reed, *Glorious Battle*, p. 20.

¹¹⁶ St. John the Evangelist Archives (SJEa), "Matters of Parochial Interest of St. John the Evangelical Church from Beginning of Work in 1861 to Close of Second Restorate in 1916-17," unpublished manuscript, Montreal, no date, index, and membership lists St. John the Evangelical Church.

¹¹⁷ SJEa, "Matters of Parochial Interest of St. John the Evangelical Church from Beginning of Work in 1861 to Close of Second Restorate in 1916-17," unpublished manuscript, Montreal, no date, pp. 25 and 43. Also see *The Church of St. John the Evangelist: A self-guided tour*, published pamphlet, Montreal, no date.

Square Mile, and was the man for doing stone and bronze work in the Anglo-Catholic community. It was likely Reid who was responsible for the design of the McCord monument.¹¹⁸ A letter from Reid to David McCord, written in August of 1915, describes some of the details that are found on the altar tomb that still stands in Mount Royal cemetery.¹¹⁹ Reid would have been the obvious choice for McCord, who placed a high value on craftsmanship.

The monument David McCord commissioned from Reid was Gothic in design, which even in 1916 would have been considered old-fashioned.¹²⁰ Built before the end of the First World War, (the cemetery doesn't keep records of its monuments), the monument's Gothic detailing reflected the Anglo-Catholic mentality of a much earlier period. The integration of the family coat-of-arms mid-way on both sides of the tabletop is symptomatic of the Anglo-Catholicism fascination with pre-modern forms which dates from the 1860s and 70s. But as Jackson Lears points out, genealogical pedigrees and coats-of-arms were also very popular among sections of the American upper class at the beginning of the century.¹²¹ In the cemetery that John Samuel helped design, beavers and maple leafs are etched into the stonework of the main gate. This would have been John Samuel's doing. Interestingly, the funerary monument commissioned by the founder of Canada's first national history museum carries no such national symbolism. It is thoroughly English.

A photo dated 1918 shows the McCord monument surrounded by a wrought iron fence with Gothic detailing.¹²² It is the fence and the embossed lettering on the top of the altar that give it away as a memorial principally to John Samuel McCord. In addition to the McCord altar, the fence also encloses two other monuments, those of Peter McGill and Bishop Fulford, close friends and

¹¹⁸ In 1915 DRM requested an estimate from Robert Reid, sculptor for a monument for the McCords, see file #1808.

MCFP, file #1217, letter from Mount Royal Cemetery Co. giving the plan of the family plot as well as a list of lots that Miss McCord requested, July 17, 1916.

¹¹⁹ MCFP, file #1808, Robert Reid to DRM, August 18, 1915.

¹²⁰ "Personal communication with Bruce Russell, September 11, 2002, Montreal."

¹²¹ Lears, *No Place of Grace*, p. 186.

¹²² MCFA, Notman Collection, M17.512 view "McCord Monument Montreal," 1918. The same photo is displayed on a wall in the offices of the Mount Royal Cemetery Company.

spiritual allies with whom John Samuel collaborated in spreading Anglicanism throughout the southeastern region of Quebec. On the top edge of the altar, large letters proclaim John Samuel as the first president of the Mount Royal Cemetery. The lettering describing David Ross McCord's achievement as founder of the McCord National Museum of McGill University is written in smaller script on one of the six side panels (one for each of the McCord children).

In the earlier burial grounds, it would have been common for members of the same congregation to be buried together. In the new rural cemeteries where the plots were sold to families as real estate, the grouping of the McCords with Peter McGill and Bishop Fulford was unusual. Laid out along curving avenues and winding footpaths, the family plots found in rural cemeteries shared more than a passing resemblance to the suburban developments, like the ones built in Montreal's 'New Town'. "The whole effect reminds one of an elegant suburban home of the period," writes John Sears. "And in fact, the same architects who designed homes for wealthy people frequently designed the enclosures and monuments for their burial lots as well."¹²³

Although Sears was describing Mount Auburn in Boston, the same was true of Montreal's Mount Royal Cemetery. The cemetery plot as a metaphor for home is also borne out by the number of side panels on the McCord monument: six in total, one for each bedroom occupied by each of the McCord children while they were still together living at home. The rural cemetery was intended as a place of rest where families slept undisturbed until the morning of the Resurrection. David McCord did not leave a separate space for his wife's biographical details on the monument. Perhaps he thought she would share his rectangle. Annie McCord had the bad luck of dying after Letitia McCord, which meant that her rectangle was filled by Letitia's name and she was obliged to share space with her sister Jane.¹²⁴ In life as in death, Annie had been forced to yield her place to her sister-in-law. When David married Letitia Chambers, both sisters were asked to

¹²³ Sears, *Sacred Place*, p. 106.

¹²⁴ I use the name Annie here to refer to David McCord's youngest sister, to distinguish her from Anne Ross McCord, her mother.

leave the family home which they did reluctantly and not without some bitterness.¹²⁵

It is by standing in Mount Royal Cemetery, surrounded by monuments to the dead, that it becomes easier to grasp the idea that drove both David McCord's project of creating a museum to house the great names of Empire in Canada, and his father's plan for a final resting place for Montreal's Protestant civic leadership. Continuity with the past and the smooth transmission of public and private authority were the concerns of both men. Keeping family together in life and in death mirrored a parallel concern with keeping the country together. Death threatened to separate people and induced a desire to forget. In the cemetery and in the museum, visitors were encouraged to remember, to momentarily slip through the divide that separated the living from the dead.

¹²⁵ MCFP, file #1852, DRM to Letitia Chambers, June 8, 1878 quoted in Miller et al., *McCord Family*, p. 79.

Chapter Three: A Family Romance

The Judge was in his library, looking up his Books
 David with his mirror, anxious o'er his looks,
 Mother in the pantry laying parcels by
 Robert in our room, torturing harmony
 Letti in her quarters, laying Goethe's ghost
 And Jane with her maladies, to be pitied -- for the most¹
 -Judge John Samuel McCord

And Oh for a man to arise in me
 That the man I am may cease to be²
 -Maude

Our lives may be determined less by our childhood than by the
 way we have learned to imagine our childhoods.³
 -James Hillman



Figure 1, Masters David Ross, John Davidson, and Robert Arthur McCord, Montreal, ca 1850 (MP488.2, McCord Museum)

¹ MCFP, file #1805, Handwriting exercise book & Poetry, "Popular Songs for Infant Minds" by John Samuel McCord, no date. Punctuation and emphasis in the original.

² MCFP, file #1805, Handwriting and exercise book & Poetry, John Samuel McCord, Tuesday, November 8, 1864, Temple Grove.

³ James Hillman, *The Soul's Code: In Search of Character and Calling* (New York: Warner Books, 1996), p. 4.

On the morning of July 1st, 1867, David Ross McCord sat down at his father's writing desk to compose a letter to his American cousin. In the background could be heard the staccato sounds of gunfire coming from the direction of the City. Temple Grove, the McCord family home on the western slope of Mount Royal, had always been vulnerable despite the distance, to the reverberations caused by cannon and gunfire coming from the military fortifications on St. Helen's Island in Montreal Harbour. Throughout the morning and well into the afternoon, the local military was engaged in a friendly ballistic rivalry to see who could outdo the other with the amount of noise they could generate in announcing the birth of Canada.⁴ While most Montrealers were out taking advantage of the fine 'Confederation weather' on this first national holiday, David McCord was at home reflecting upon the deaths of family members in a letter to his Southern cousin Charlotte McCord Cheves.

David Ross McCord was twenty-three at the time and on the brink of entering his adult life. In the same year that Canada reconfigured her colonial ties with Britain and became a separate nation, David Ross McCord was grappling with his own issues of identity and independence. The death of his sister, father, and in June of 1866, that of his older brother, had left David unexpectedly, at the age of twenty-two, the head of the McCord family. These cataclysmic events in his personal life found their echo in the social and political changes that were taking place around him and transforming the city and country of his birth. It was an event that would change the direction of David McCord's life, but in this letter, it is his father's death and not his brother's that receives the most attention.

Written on the second anniversary of Judge John Samuel McCord's burial, David McCord is still preoccupied with his father's passing. "...A sad day for us, for with every month we realize more fully the depth of our affliction. We are so to speak, without a head for I am, of course, too young to hope to occupy my father's place for many years to come, [if] I ever shall."⁵ Anxious words from the pen of a young man who was already feeling the weight of adult responsibility. At

⁴ Kathleen Jenkins, *Montreal: Island City of the St. Lawrence* (New York: Doubleday, 1968), p. 384.

⁵ MCFP, file #1812, David Ross McCord (DRM) to Mrs. Langdon Cheves, July 1, 1867.

twenty-three, David McCord was still living at home without any means of support other than his family. It was a curious position to be in, being both a dependent and the head of the same family.

What lay before David Ross McCord in 1867, was the daunting prospect of having to support himself, his widowed mother, and two surviving sisters on an income that was less than half of what his father had earned as a Superior Court judge and rentier. Adding to David McCord's money woes was the knowledge that the principal source of the McCord family revenue, land leased from two Catholic religious communities, the Hôtel Dieu and the Congregation Notre-Dame, would in his generation be returned to its original owners, leaving David McCord in his mature years dependent on professional earnings for his support. In the spring of 1867, after having completed a three-year clerkship with his family's law firm, Leblanc, Cassidy, Leblanc, David graduated from McGill University with a bachelor's degree in law and an MA from the Arts faculty. For a young man of McCord's social class, a university education was becoming an important rite of passage, but the real test of manhood still remained: marriage and having the means to support a wife and family in comfort. Historian John Tosh writes: "To form a household, to exercise authority over dependents, and to shoulder the responsibility of maintaining and protecting them – these things set the seal on a man's gender identity."⁶ Given the extent of David McCord's financial and emotional commitments, it would be years before he would be in a position to marry.

When John Davidson died in 1866, a year after his father, the pattern of familial succession was abruptly redrawn. Suddenly, David Ross McCord found himself thrust into a role for which he had received little preparation. By his own admission, he was unsure about his own ability to carry it off. Having assumed the position by default, he was feeling especially sensitive to issues of legitimacy and it shows in his letter to Charlotte. Family history becomes David McCord's chosen vehicle for revising his place within the 'family romance'. The expression

⁶ John Tosh, *A Man's Place: Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England* (London: Yale University Press, 1999), p. 108.

'family romances' was introduced to the twentieth-century lexicon by Sigmund Freud. In his article of the same title published in 1909, Freud discussed the role of imagination in the individuation process. His main interest was showing how children separated from their parents, but he also mentions the contribution of siblings to this process. Using the trope of romantic love, Freud described the relationship between parents and children as an intense love affair, but one that was destined to end in disillusionment, if the child (he was mostly thinking of male children here) was to develop his own authority, and create a separate place for himself in the public world.⁷ In this chapter, I use 'family romances' to denote David McCord's attempts at rewriting family history to justify his position as head of the McCord family.

The family David Ross McCord was born into in 1844, like all families, was a work in progress. His role within the family depended less on individual temperament and more on plot lines previously worked out by past generations. The story itself was open ended enough to accommodate a newcomer, but the part David would be expected to play had already been scripted long before his birth. From a story that was not of his making David fashioned a personal and familial narrative of mythic proportions. During a lifetime David subjected his version of the 'family romance' to a number of retellings, but the first recorded example I found was the letter he wrote to Charlotte McCord Cheves on Dominion Day. Writing from the perspective of the chosen son, the legitimate heir to John Samuel's legacy, David Ross McCord offers his cousin Charlotte McCord

⁷ Sigmund Freud, "Family Romances" in *Collected Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. ix, ed. James Strachey (London: Hogarth, 1950), p. 240. Over the years 'Family Romances' has been the subject of many rereadings by scholars. In the 1960s, the literary critic Harold Bloom undertook to recast the entire Western poetic tradition in the mould provided by Freud's Oedipal complex. In his work he drew the parallel between young poets and sons, both living anxiously in the shadow of the strong poet/father figure, who had come before them and triumphed. Hoping to throw off the 'anxiety of influence' generated by the 'strong poet', the young poet undertook to rewrite his father's poems as a means to making them his own. See Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence; a theory of poetry* (New York: Oxford, 1973). Also see Christine van Boheemen, *The Novel as Family Romance: Language, Gender, and Authority from Fielding to Joyce* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University, 1987) and Janet Beizer, *Family Plots: Balzac's Narrative Generations* (New Haven: Yale University Press, University of California Press, 1986). 'Family Romances' also informs the work of the historian Lynn Hunt in *The Family Romance of the French Revolution* (Berkeley, Los Angeles: 1992), and Jean Strouse, "Alice James: A Family Romance,"

Cheves, an interpretation of the family story which depends heavily on the trope of professional success, in this instance in the field of law, for its coherence. When the McCord National Museum opened its doors in the fall of 1921, it was David McCord's 'family romance', which formed the backbone of his narrative of Canadian history.

In this first exhibition, and the only one curated by McCord, the introductory text panel to the McCord Room alerted visitors to the accomplishments of the founder's family. The McCord family was depicted as representing "the longest line of Judges and of Battle Honours in Canada. The family has given to the Bench six occupants and a seventh declined that honour in a hundred and fifty years."⁸ David McCord did not choose to legitimize his claims to historical authority based on his family's financial successes, nor his father's contribution to scientific knowledge in the young colony, or the excellence of his mother's botanical drawings for that matter. What justified a separate room celebrating McCord achievements in the only museum in Canada dedicated to its history was, in David McCord's mind, their work as jurists and soldiers. Having embraced the martial tradition, his male ancestors had honourably discharged their duties in the maintenance of a British presence in North America.

People create themselves through their stories. "We achieve our personal identities and self-concept through the use of the narrative configuration, and make our existence into a whole by understanding it as an expression of a single unfolding and developing story," writes psychologist Jerome Bruner.⁹ In the summer of 1867, David Ross McCord was struggling to find his own identity. The deaths of his older sister and brother and their father added to the urgency of the task. His place in this radically refigured family group was in a state of flux. Given the context, it is not surprising then, that the elements he took to construct his own personal narrative in the McCord family, related to the line of lawmakers. In his letter to his American cousin, David McCord took advantage of the

in *Psychology and Historical Interpretation*, ed. William Runyan (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. 103.

⁸ MCFP, file #2065, Room D: McCords et al., "David Ross McCord."

opportunity to 'laid down the law' of his ascendancy. David Ross McCord cast himself as the dutiful son, the child chosen by destiny to perpetuate the family name and safeguard its fortunes in the wider world. By the time his story entered the McCord museum fifty-four years later, the dutiful son had become the dutiful 'handmaid of Canada', chosen by God to safeguard the objects of 'empire' as a means to preserve the nation of Canada.

In the letter to his American cousin where David McCord's dynastic aspirations first appear, he begins on a self-effacing note. Conscious that he was already a year late with his reply he starts:

I hardly know how adequately to apologize for my lengthy delay in responding. I crave your kind forgiveness, for I assure you that my silence was not indicative of any absence of respect. My dear mother was overcome with deep grief_____. As one of my father's executors, and the necessity of making myself master of the mysteries of the Law, [I] was very fully occupied. Pray kindly extend pardon for this apparent rudeness, which I promise you will never occur again. I now hasten to comply with your request, which, believe me, is a pleasure, and I will endeavour not to repeat anything contained in my last letter. I have much pleasure in enclosing a few carte-de-visite of our dear Father and one of our youngest sister and another one of Mrs. Jane Davidson Ross, our maternal grandmother. That of my father in his robes as Chancellor of Bishop's College Lennoxville, one hundred miles east of Montreal is a duplicate..., between that date and this his death the Judge's appearance did not alter. There is an oil painting in the dining hall at the College, which we do not think as excellent a likeness, though equal to most of those for public institutions. We have no carte-de-visite or indeed any photographic likeness of our dear mother. She however, [has made a] promise of one.¹⁰

What had brought the cousins together on the page was grief, grief at the shared loss of a family patriarch. Writing to David Ross McCord in June of 1866 in response to news of John Samuel's passing, Charlotte Cheves begins:

All the details you give me of your dear and honoured father, of your family circle are deeply interesting to me and my daughters, & I most sincerely grieve and sympathize with you in the loss you have all sustained in the death of your Father! Of the melancholy circumstances I had been informed by Mrs. Hymand (?) from England, & I have been intending and wishing for months to write to your poor mother, to tell her how much I sympathised & grieved both with and for her! It is a

⁹ Jerome Bruner, *Acts of Meaning* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990), pp. 115-116.

¹⁰ MCFP, file #1812, DRM to Mrs. Langdon Cheves, July 1, 1867.

melancholy & most lamentable epoch in our lives, when the Head & centre of the family circle is taken from us is one of the most bitter trials of our human condition. _____ are indeed idle to express all the afflictions of such a loss. I too, have experienced it!¹¹

Condolence letters were intended to provide comfort to the survivors by offering them flattering portraits of their loved ones and by placing them in a privileged position next to the Divine. Pat Jalland who read thousands of condolence letters for her book *Death in the Victorian Family* found that most letters exhibited “a high level of sensitivity and understanding of the process of grief, often founded on personal experience...”¹²

David’s reply, sent a year later letter, barely acknowledges Charlotte’s losses; in fact, he quickly dispenses with them in the following sentence: “We hope that your health has been quite re-established, and that your pecuniary position is improved, for we read with great interest the details you kindly communicated relative to your plantations.”¹³ David McCord’s reluctance to address his cousin’s grief was not due to a lack of experience. More to the point, he barely knew his cousin or her family. David McCord and Charlotte Cheves had only met once, in the summer of 1847, when Charlotte McCord Cheves had visited Temple Grove with her husband. David McCord was three at the time. Charlotte writes: “I am sorry to confess I have a very indefinite idea of yourself, my younger cousin, who bears the name of my father!”¹⁴ What they knew about each other was summed up in their letters.

What had precipitated Charlotte Cheves’ visit to Temple Grove was an earlier exchange of letters in 1846 between her late father, David McCord and John Samuel McCord. The year before Samuel Hale, John Samuel’s former legal mentor, had traveled to South Carolina where he had made the acquaintance of David McCord who was also a lawyer. On his return to Montreal he mentioned the meeting to John Samuel and made the suggestion that he “might find some

¹¹ MCFP, file #1812, Correspondence with McCords of South Carolina, Mrs. Charlotte Cheves to DRM, June 13, 1866.

¹² Pat Jalland, *Death in the Victorian Family* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 307.

¹³ MCFP, file #1812, DRM to Mrs. Langdon Cheves, July 1, 1867.

¹⁴ MCFP, file #1812, Correspondence with McCords of South Carolina and Georgia, Charlotte L. Cheves to DRM, June 13, 1866.

interest in the inquiry of the origin of [their] respective families, coat of arms etc....”¹⁵ In a letter to David McCord dated October 19, 1846, John Samuel asked:

“Have you the means of ascertaining the name of my genealogical tree. I very much regret that your bashfulness should have prevented your introduction to my late father, who would have been delighted to have seen anyone of our name, and you and I might have enjoyed the pleasure of a long friendship.”¹⁶

All of the letters from their mutual correspondence that survive contain inquiries about family history. John Samuel’s side of the correspondence was short and went straight to the point:

Our story is simply this handed down from father to son. Our origin is Scotch but our immediate ancestors are Irish. The family is said to have come over to Ireland with Cromwell and settled in the Counties of Antrim and Armagh. My grandfather came out to Quebec shortly after the conquest of this Province, about 1760 and settled as a merchant there. He had two sons, my uncle John and my father Thomas.¹⁷

As a published writer as well as a lawyer, David McCord’s letters were more descriptive. Unlike John Samuel, he even thought to include a paragraph on his mother’s family.

Both John Samuel and David McCord were motivated by a desire to uncover a common ancestor, the missing McCord link, who would prove their shared bloodline. Inventing family ties where none had previously existed, especially where the families involved were accomplished or wealthy, was not so unusual a pastime in the later half of the nineteenth century.¹⁸ Genealogy was popular among the well-to-do because it was a way of confirming status.¹⁹ Following up obscure connections with people of the same name was part of the fun. For John Samuel and David McCord, the search proved inconclusive. Neither

¹⁵ MCFP, file #1812a, Correspondence with McCords of South Carolina, JSM to David McCord, August 29, 1846.

¹⁶ MCFP, file #1812a, Correspondence with McCords of South Carolina, JSM to David McCord, October 19, 1846. Punctuation and emphasis in the original.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ See Caroline-Isabelle Caron, “Se créer des ancêtres. Les écrits historiques et généalogiques des de Forest et des Forest d’Amérique du Nord, 19 et 20 siècles,” Ph.D. History, McGill University, 2000.

¹⁹ In 1845 the New England Genealogical Society began operation. See Caron, “Se créer des ancêtres.”

man possessed sufficient knowledge of their family's history beyond their grandparents' generation. In his closing remarks David McCord writes:

... I do think there is a strong presumption that we are of the same family. I have long been led to believe that I came from the family in Armagh, for I have heard of no more elsewhere in Ireland, and if you think me worthy of the honour, we shall hereafter recognize each other as relations.²⁰

David Ross McCord picked up his father's interest in the Southern McCords, but why he kept up the connection, I suspect, had less to do with John Samuel's desire to make "an agreeable and valuable acquaintance," and more to do with David Ross' dynastic pretensions.²¹

In the remainder of the letter, he takes as his subject the British North American branch of the McCord family. After commiserating with his cousin about her losses, David Ross quickly moves on to what is clearly his main interest - family genealogy. In the next line he asks: "I would like to know the degree of relationship between John McCord, the ancestors who settled in Canada and the McCord who founded the family in the South."²² He then follows up his question with a list of the McCords living in Canada and in the case of the men, their legal accomplishments. Genealogies are family recipes for continuity. As a type of family history, they encourage the survival of familial tradition by providing a tried and true method for dealing with generational change. "Transmission is the fundamental trope of genealogy," writes Carole-Isabelle Caron. "Without transmission, genealogy has no logic, no purpose."²³ Western culture has used genealogy to legitimize the transmission of patriarchal power since the time of the Old Testament beginning with the book of Genesis.

When John Davidson, his eldest brother and John Samuel's namesake died, it fell to David Ross McCord to fulfill the role of family patriarch. In most Victorian middle and upper-class families, tradition dictated that the first-born son assume the responsibility of passing on the family name and reputation to the next

²⁰ MCFP, file #1812a, Correspondence with McCords of South Carolina, David McCord to JSM, September 12, 1846.

²¹ MCFP, file #1812a, Correspondence with McCords of South Carolina, JSM to David McCord, August 29, 1846.

²² MCFP, file #1812, DRM to Mrs. Langdon Cheves, July 1, 1867.

²³ Caron, "Se créer des ancêtres," trans. Kathryn Harvey, p. 53.

generation. Without the unexpected loss of John, David Ross would have remained the second-born son, the male child from whom less was expected, and who was often forced to seek his fortune away from home. It was a position in the family hierarchy which carried fewer responsibilities, but also offered fewer rewards.

In the Anglican Church to which David McCord belonged, issues of succession were of special concern. Practitioners of the doctrine of Apostolic Succession, Anglicans believed that the spiritual leadership of their church derived its powers from an uninterrupted transmission of authority from the twelve Apostles through successive Bishops. David Ross McCord's obsession with legitimacy arose out of a concern with his place in the family order, but it was also shaped by his religious culture. Birth order had designated John Davidson first in the McCord line of succession from father to son. Named for his father and great-grandfather, founder of the family in British North America, his name confirmed John's privileged role in promoting family continuity. With his brother's death, David Ross McCord was able to improve on nature and assume what had become his place as his father's legitimate heir. David Ross McCord was determined to show his cousin and the rest of the world that he was his father's chosen son. Reputation, authority and respect were all elements of his father's patrimony to which David McCord wished to lay claim. Named for his mother's father, David Ross McCord could not anchor his McCord identity in a family name. What he offered in place of name and birth order, was his credential as a lawyer, a profession he shared with his father, uncle, cousin and grandfather. As the last in a long line of legal professionals, David Ross McCord recast the lines of transmission that joined father to son.

A second trope of genealogy is heritage. In the version of family history he shares with his cousin, David Ross McCord has already departed from the simplicity of his father's account. In David Ross McCord's version, the legal accomplishments of his male McCord relatives become the important embellishments that transform an otherwise undistinguished genealogical record into something more heroic.

I will now, if not taxing your goodness to too great an extent give some details of members of the family. Our uncle William King McCord, was also a Judge of the Superior Court. He was educated at the University of Cambridge, England and was promoted to the Bench when 40 years of age. His son Thomas McCord, aged about 38, is an excellent lawyer; he has been for the past two or three years one of the two secretaries to the "Commission for the Codification of the Civil Law of Lower Canada and for framing the Code of Procedure". His labours are just completed. He is about to publish a "Hand Book" to the Code which will be very valuable.²⁴

Genealogical research is often fuelled by the desire to create an impressive lineage. What this lineage consists of is more often determined by the interests of the seeker than the ancestors sought. If David Ross McCord had been a merchant instead of a lawyer, the emphasis on kinship would probably have been with his great-grandfather, a merchant. In what is essentially a quest for identity, it is the individual who seeks for examples that confirm the self. As a young and untried lawyer, choosing to highlight his McCord family's legal accomplishments provided David Ross with an instant-if self-constructed – authority to go with his new position in the family that he otherwise lacked. In 1867, David McCord had another year before he was eligible to join the Bar of Lower Canada and make a living from his profession. His ability to administer the family's finances and otherwise fill the role his father had vacated had yet-to-be put to the test. While his mother remained alive, being the head of the McCord family would continue to be a shared responsibility. Still waiting for his adult life to unfold, David McCord considered his biggest asset to be his family tree.

A subtext of David's letter was family continuity in the face of death. Not the romantic death pictured by Victorian fiction – the distorted faces of loved ones as they clustered around the dying – nor the 'good' death promoted by the Protestant Church. David calls his father's death an 'affliction'. In the passage that follows, he also makes the point that it is a force that unifies the generations.

The family lot in Mount Royal Cemetery presented so beautifully [in a] hollow in the centre of the Montreal mountain and one of the most beautiful in America, contains the remains of four generations of McCord's in other words, with the exception of a great Uncle, John McCord who is interred in Quebec; all the male _____ of

²⁴ MCFP, file #1812, DRM to Mrs. Langdon Cheves, July 1, 1867.

the family in the North. There is there _____ our great-grandfather, John McCord died in 1711(sic), Our grand-father Thomas McCord, our father and his brother Hon. Justice William McCord, and our brother John and sister Eleanor. I hope this "tree" has not wearied you. It was necessary to place you at a glance in possession of the family history, and that of my mother's family.²⁵

In this passage, David McCord seems to be saying that biological death can be transcended through acknowledging the links between individuals and their larger kinship network. The ongoing biological continuity of family does not have to be broken by death. Parents can live on in, and through their children, while children keep their relationship with their parents alive by enacting specific rituals.²⁶ In David McCord's case it was collecting, and later museum building, that became his chosen practice for maintaining a relationship with his male ancestors.

Social evolutionists used the tree in the nineteenth century as a map of human evolutionary progress.²⁷ In David McCord's domesticated version, the tree illustrates a vision of self that sets David Ross McCord on top of his family tree beneath which the accomplishments of all previous generations of McCords are subsumed. The use of the 'tree' symbol suggests that all growth is natural and moves in an upward direction culminating in the apogee of progress. When David Ross McCord speaks of "the family history" as a definitive history that he creates, he is supported by a classificatory system that ranks, subordinates, and otherwise eliminates, all competitive interpretations.

What David Ross McCord eliminated from his tree is the female branch. Eleanor was the only one of the McCord children Charlotte Cheves remembered from her 1847 visit: "The death of your sister was also a shock to me! I remember well the delicate, sweet tempered little girl, who greeted us at Temple Grove, & have often wished to know something of her!"²⁸ Yet, in his return letter, David devotes only two lines to his sister: "Eleanor Elizabeth, whom you remember as a child, married Mr. George Lewis, at present, as then, of New York, but an

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ David Chidester, *Patterns of Transcendence: Religion, Death, and Dying* (Belmont, California: Wadsworth Publishing Co., 1990), p. 14.

²⁷ Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather* (New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 37.

Englishman, died in 1863 _____ about a year and a half, leaving no child.”²⁹
 About his mother’s family he mentions not a word.

The letter to his cousin is not the only place where David Ross McCord vaunts his father’s side of the family at the expense of his connection to the Ross family. Similar to the family tree, the family album was another vehicle for expressing the patriarchal nature of Victorian familial relationships. In the McCord family album compiled by David Ross McCord sometime after his mother’s death in 1870 (the ‘Green’ album), Anne Ross McCord’s presence is no more than a shadow. Anne Ross haunts the album, writes Martha Langford in *Suspended Conversations*, “...friendly salutations and messages of love hidden on the backs of the ‘cartes-de-visite’ are mainly dedicated to her. But those private sentiments are concealed.”³⁰ In the opening spread of this Green album, pride of place goes to a large-format portrait of Judge John Samuel McCord. On the second page, in smaller format, appears the same image of John Samuel, this time flanked by his second son, David Ross McCord. Where one would expect a portrait of Mrs. Anne Ross McCord, instead appears a photo of Eleanor Elizabeth, the eldest daughter who died in 1863. Beside her is a photograph of an unidentified graveyard. On the accompanying page are photographs of John Davidson, Robert Arthur, and David Ross McCord again. His surviving sisters do not appear in this opening spread. Their likenesses are relegated to pages further back in the album among the relatives and acquaintances.

²⁸ MCFP, file #1812, correspondence with McCords of S.C. & Georgia, Charlotte Cheves to DRM.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Martha Langford, *Suspended Conversations* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s Press, 2001), p. 93.

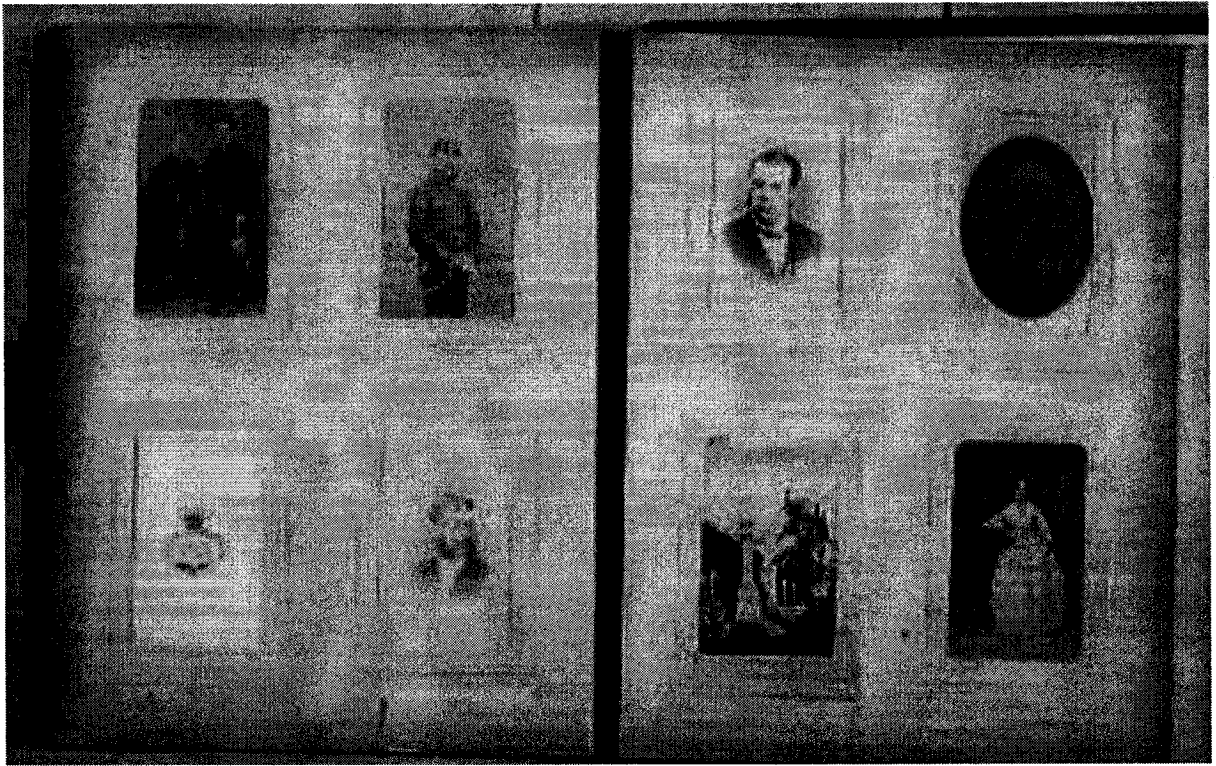


Figure 2, McCord family album photo frontispiece, (McFa N060.2-3)

In the Green album, David Ross makes his patrimonial claim on the first three pages. Using ‘cartes-de-visite’ that belonged to his mother, in addition to other entries that post-dated her death, David Ross McCord creates a genealogical arrangement that visually confirms his place as anointed head of the McCord family. In the family history David Ross McCord created for his American cousin, and in the family album he assembled to show visitors at Temple Grove, John Davidson and the other McCord siblings have already become footnotes to their brother’s dynastic ambitions.

In this chapter, I use the term ‘family romance’ to describe David Ross McCord’s attempts at revising family history. The expression ‘family romance’ as I have mentioned, can be attributed to Sigmund Freud.³¹ In *Family Romances* published in 1909, Freud described the strategies employed by children in their Oedipal quest to separate from their parents. By reframing Freud’s work in the context of David Ross McCord’s life, I hope to shed some light on the

³¹ Freud, *Collected Works*, p. 240.

motivations of McCord, a man who nearing the end of his life sacrificed everything to his dream of opening a museum of Canadian history. In his quest to found a museum that bore his name, family relationships were undermined, his health ruined, and his financial security seriously jeopardized. Why? What would drive a man at the end of his life to invest most of his time and all of his resources in a museum? What follows is an attempt to provide some answers to this question.

II

In the nineteenth century, the death of the family patriarch was considered an event of tragic proportions. Not only were family members deprived of the presence of a loved one, but in his passing was contained the threat of decline for the entire family. "Figurehead of the family as well as of civil society, the father dominates the history of private life in the nineteenth century," writes Michelle Perrot.³² To lose a father then was to lose not only a breadwinner but representation for the family in the larger civic and religious community. This has been the standard interpretation of loss made by historians. In the historical literature what made a husband's death such a "bitter trial" for wife and child was the financial hardship and diminished social standing associated with the loss. Missing is any mention of the emotional impact of losing a loved one.

The death of the male head placed in sharp relief the asymmetrical relations of power that structured bourgeois familial intimacy. It may have been the mother's hand that rocked the cradle but it was the father's fist which firmly grasped the family purse. Despite the rhetoric championing women's special place within the home, men's dominance in the public world of politics, business, and the church spilled over into the household where their responsibilities for moral and secular education, physical protection, and financial support, gave them considerable clout.³³ Historian Steven Mintz writes: "Where earlier 'dependents' had suggested a wide range of relatives and associates with whom one was

³² Michelle Perrot, "Roles and Characters," in *A History of Private Life, Vol. IV*, ed. Michelle Perrot (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990) p. 167.

³³ Perrot, "Roles and Characters," p. 170.

connected and for whom one was responsible, by the early nineteenth century, the concept increasingly narrowed to denote financial dependence, particularly the dependence of a man's wife and children."³⁴ Within the context created by the bourgeois family, dependence took on a new meaning in the nineteenth-century.

New laws that prevented married women from owning property, entering into business, contracting, and controlling their own earnings, were a reflection of this new reality. A father's authority was not only buttressed by law, but also by the religious practices of the Christian Church which equated the earth-bound father with God the Father. "Political and religious theorists viewed the father's authority as part of a continuous chain of hierarchical and delegated authority descending from God."³⁵ Proof of the head of the household's divinely ordained authority was found in the daily round of prayers over which the husband and father were expected to preside.³⁶ John Samuel also kept a record of his prayers in his diary, most of which revealed a preoccupation with the wellbeing of his children. His desire for a longer life was always couched in terms of being able to provide for his children.

May it please God to give me grace to set my house in order, not knowing when my time may come. For the sake of my children's future welfare, I pray God to spare me yet a little while - but I have long felt that there is no peace on earth, although God has blessed me with many favours, for which may I show my gratitude by endeavouring to lead a Holy Life.³⁷

Pat Jalland's book *Death in the Victorian Family* says little about the impact of a father's death on his children. According to Jalland, married women had the most to mourn. "Victorian and Edwardian widows usually suffered a greater sense of the total disintegration of their lives, which for most were dependent on the financial means, social status, and professional careers of their husbands."³⁸ David McCord's correspondent, Charlotte McCord, a recent widow herself, was no less emphatic in her description of the widowed state as "a

³⁴ Steven Mintz, *A Prison of Expectations* (New York: New York University Press, 1983), p. 61.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 60.

³⁶ Tosh, *A Man's Place*, p. 37.

³⁷ MCFP, file #413, John Samuel McCord's diary, December 19, 1856. Punctuation and emphasis in the original.

³⁸ Pat Jalland, *Death in the Victorian Family*, p. 235.

melancholy and most lamentable epoch in our lives, when the Head and centre of the family circle is taken from us is one of the most bitter trials of our human condition. [I am] idle to express all the afflictions of such a loss.”³⁹

Fathers held considerable power over their children’s future. This was especially true of male children who were dependent on fathers for their professional education and for the network of male relationships that would ease their transition into the public world of work. John Samuel was instrumental in obtaining professional accreditation for at least two of his three sons. Having chosen his father’s profession, David McCord had the most to gain from being the son of a judge. As a teenager, David McCord’s job of collecting rents on his family properties brought him in close contact with Monsieur LeBlanc, one of his father’s few French-Canadian friends, and the man who would later be entrusted with his legal education. In the case of Robert Arthur whose interest ran to things military, John Samuel’s long history with the local militia was not without its benefits when it came time to procure a commission in the British army for his youngest son. A friendship with Colonel Rollo proved especially helpful in this regard:

Colonel and Mrs. Rollo came up PPC. I parted with them with most sincere regret. They have proved themselves most amiable and agreeable friends. The Colonel has certainly been most kind and friendly to Bob [Robert Arthur], and she too is kind and beautiful. Byron’s words ‘The night the Majesty of Loveliness are less...’ We parted kissing hands cavalier style.⁴⁰

The death of a father was often interpreted as sign of decline, but as Michelle Perrot points out, it also provided the conditions necessary for renewal in the next generation. Michelle Perrot, who has written extensively about the nineteenth-century family in France, maintains that while the death of the father was an event that diminished the family of origin it also provided older children with the opportunity to go their separate ways and start their own families. Freed of their father’s authority by his death, sons were empowered to strike out in new directions and develop their potential in accordance with their interests. This of

³⁹ MCFP, file #1812, Charlotte McCord Cheves of South Carolina to DRM, June 13, 1866.

course only worked if the child's internalized set of paternal expectations were less powerful than his own desires. Following the death of his father, Freud began work on *The Interpretation of Dreams*, a monumental study of both dreams in general and Freud's own dreams in particular. Freud wrote that the book constituted a "portion of my own self-analysis, my reaction to my father's death – that is to say, to the most important event, the most poignant loss of a man's life."⁴¹ Freud described this process as a turning within, the beginning of a period of deep introspection, culminating in a heightened sense of self and self-direction.

Of the surviving children, only Robert Arthur left home. For this show of independence, he was deprived of his share of the family inheritance, and was eventually disowned by his remaining brother and sisters. Of all the children, David Ross McCord came closest to reproducing his parent's way of life. As a lawyer and sole proprietor of Temple Grove, he had appropriated but the shell of his parent's existence, without children, the essential element needed for familial continuity was missing. While in their early thirties, David McCord and his younger brother Robert Arthur married within months of each other. Both men married women older than themselves and neither union produced any children, although there is some evidence to suggest that Mary Bone, Robert Arthur's wife, was pregnant prior to her husband's death in 1882. Instead of acting as a stimulus for achieving an independent adult identity, John Samuel's death appeared to have the opposite effect, of contributing to an even greater dependence on the family of origin.

There was a strong economic rationale for remaining together at Temple Grove. David Ross McCord and his two sisters lived together for eight years after their parents' death, and would have continued to do so if David McCord had not asked them to leave just prior to his marriage to Letitia Chambers. The conditions of John Samuel's will which called for an equal division of familial assets (most of which were in the form of property that was not easily divisible), to be shared among all five children, certainly encouraged the economic tie that bound them

⁴⁰ MCFP, file #416, John Samuel McCord's diary, June 6, 1865.

⁴¹ Sigmund Freud, *Interpretations of Dreams* (New York, Avon Books, 1965), p. xxvi.

together. For the two surviving sisters, Jane and Annie, who never married, financial dependence on their brother David who controlled the McCord estate as its executor, was almost total. As upper-class spinsters, their only source of income remained that which they received from their inheritance. As the executor, David McCord had more power in this arrangement, but he nonetheless was still forced to rely on his sisters and remaining brother for their cooperation in whatever economic decisions he made on behalf of the estate. The McCord's wealth provides one explanation for why the family remained intact long after it was time for individual members to go their separate ways. There were other reasons, chief among them the kind of relationships Anne Ross and John Samuel McCord fostered among their children, and with their peers.

It appears David Ross McCord responded to the rupture that death provoked in his relationship with his father by intensifying his attachment to John Samuel's memory. The importance he gave to maintaining the father/son bond beyond death had very little to do with economics. David McCord manifested his bond with his father by attempting to imitate his father's public life. In his early years as a lawyer, David McCord devoted much of his time to the same kind of activities his father had engaged in. He adored his father, and throughout David McCord's life and right up until his own death, his father remained a vivid presence. In pursuing John Samuel's profession, and in picking up the threads of his other pastimes – collecting and diary-keeping being significant examples – David McCord seemed to be trying to maintain a connection with his father that survived physical loss.

What is striking about David Ross McCord's life up until his marriage to Letitia Chambers in 1878, was how much it resembled his father's. Step by step, point-by-point, David McCord did what his father had done before him. John Samuel was a lawyer before he became a Superior Court judge. David McCord studied law. Both men married when in their early thirties. A few months before his father's death, David McCord joined the Natural History Society, an institution which John Samuel had helped found. Like his father before him, he took control of the family business, administering the various leases that made up

the McCord estate on behalf of his other siblings. Ensign in the local militia, Mason, member of the board of the Mount Royal Cemetery, delegate to the Anglican Synod, were all activities his father had pursued before him. Even David McCord's original collection of Canadiana was inherited from his father.⁴² David Ross McCord permitted few deviations from his father's path. Even his time spent as a City of Montreal alderman and chairman of the City's health committee (an office his father never held) was taken up with hospital work, something John Samuel had done as a board member of the Montreal General Hospital.

At every step of the way, however, things did not work out quite as well for the son as they had for the father. David Ross McCord graduated from McGill University with a degree in law and a MA, but he never became a judge. In the last decade of the nineteenth century, he allowed his law practice to languish while he devoted ever increasing amounts of his time and the McCord family's money to his great passion, collecting. With the exception of his work as the head of the Health Committee on Montreal City Council, his leadership abilities never quite measured up to those of his father. His initial enthusiasm for confronting the City's health problems soon waned after he encountered opposition to his smallpox hospital from members of the council who felt the committee had overstepped its mandate and was spreading panic among Montrealers by dwelling too much on the threat posed by contagious disease. Where John Samuel led, often occupying the position of director or president, David McCord was more of a follower, taking the place of secretary in which he exercised much less authority.

In private life, David McCord did not meet with any more success. John Samuel's marriage to his second cousin Anne Ross, the eldest daughter of David Ross, King's Council, and one of the wealthiest landowners in the province, was an advantageous match that served to consolidate his position in the upper reaches of the ruling class in Lower Canada.⁴³ Eight years his junior, Anne Ross

⁴² Pam Miller in "'When There is No Vision, the People Perish'. The McCord Family Papers, 1766-1945," *Fontanus*, Vol. III, 1990, pp. 26-28, writes that David Ross McCord's passion for collecting was inherited from his mother who was also an avid collector.

⁴³ According to historian Donald Fyson, David Ross is sometimes mistakenly referred to as

successfully bore six children, all of who lived to adulthood. It appears it was a happy marriage, with both parties taking great pleasure in the family life they created at Temple Grove. David Ross McCord's marriage, to a woman outside of his social class, actually reversed a practice of three generations of McCord men who had used marriage to significantly improve their social status. There is some confusion about Letitia Chamber's age and it is possible that she was a couple of years older than David Ross McCord, which would have placed her in her mid-thirties at the time of their marriage. They had no children. It is impossible to know what kind of relationship they had for the first thirty years of their life together, given the lack of evidence – David McCord had all of his wife's correspondence destroyed – but in the ten years prior to their deaths they spent much of their time apart. By this time, David McCord was diagnosed with homicidal dementia and was institutionalized in order to prevent him from trying to kill his wife.⁴⁴

Why David McCord did not find a suitable partner among the eligible women of his milieu is anyone's guess. In the McCord archives there are two poems, the second one a reply to the first, which speaks to an earlier attachment. The woman in question was a neighbour and the daughter of one of John Samuel's business partners. The poems read as follows:

"Butterflies By One of Them"

All that Minerva in thy net may cast.
Are treasures, ____ take and hold fast.
But those that Cupid to thy hand may yield
Release, for they mistook their field.
Friday, Nov. 11, 1864, 3 1/2 Temple Grove

Attorney or Advocate General of Lower Canada in historical sources. See *The Canadian Biographical Dictionary and Portrait Gallery of Eminent and Self-Made Men: Quebec and the Maritime Provinces* (Chicago: American Biographical Publishing Co., 1881), p. 386. When Stephen Sewell was suspended as Solicitor General in 1815, Ross was asked to undertake business for the Crown in Montreal on a temporary basis but this lasted only until Charles Marshall was appointed Solicitor General in December 1816. See NA RG7 G15C vol. 20: 21-22, Loring to David Ross, April 29, 1815. For more on his role as King's Council see NA RG4 A1 vol. 169, Ross to Ryland (Governor's civil secretary), October 15, 1817.

⁴⁴ David Ross McCord was admitted to the Homewood Sanatorium in September 1923. MCFP file #3003, Homewood correspondence, DRM to LCM, September 26, 1923.

“To a Butterfly”

Return bright creature to thy home
 Ere thou art caught in thy own net.
 Leave me and Minerva's flowers.
 Ever improving life's fleet hours.
 Ah! Why still linger thus in peril
 Such trifling is poor folly. _____
 Ever advancing Heavenward soar;
 Danger awaits thee, flee this shore.

Casa del Monte, Friday 4 pm, November 11, 1864⁴⁵

Casa del Monte was the mountainside residence of the Day family. J.J. Day, the father, was a lawyer by profession, and city alderman.⁴⁶ When William King McCord was looking for a way to pay down his debts, it was to J.J. Day, John Samuel McCord's neighbour, that he sold his share of the McCord family heritage. The Day's had at least two daughters. It is unclear as to which one David Ross McCord was corresponding. When the eldest daughter married in England, John Samuel McCord noted it in his diary.

John Samuel provided David Ross McCord with his measure for assessing successful masculinity. Over a lifetime, David McCord strived to achieve what his father had accomplished, but in the end to very different effect. In the 1880s after his marriage to Letitia Chambers, David McCord showed less inclination towards becoming the kind of public man his father's life had embodied. Or perhaps more to the point, David McCord had already discovered that John Samuel's model of manliness, influenced as it was by an earlier generation's infatuation with ancient Greece, was almost impossible to replicate in Montreal's political climate during the last decades of the nineteenth century.

The Lower-Canadian Rebellion marked a turning point in John Samuel's fortunes. Finding himself on the winning side, he was rewarded for his pro-British sympathies with career opportunities that moved him into the upper ranks of the administrative elite. In the aftermath of the failed *Patriote* Rebellion, British colonial authorities, anxious to forestall any future outbreaks, moved quickly to

⁴⁵ MCFP, file #1805, DRM to Casa del Monte, Casa del Monte to DRM, Friday, Nov. 11, 1864.

install a system of surveillance. Solidly loyalist men like John Samuel who had proven themselves adept at handling rough justice on the battlefield, were ideal candidates for positions in the newly emerging police/judicial order.⁴⁷ His first stint on the bench was as a stipendiary rural magistrate. Other promotions followed: in 1842 to the Saint Jean Circuit Court and in 1857 to the Superior Court of Bedford, Quebec, a position he occupied until his death.

In post-Rebellion Quebec, the struggle to graft British institutions onto a French-Canadian body politic took a spatial form. Following the victory by the British side, a flurry of English Protestant institution building ensued, led by people like John Samuel and his friends Peter McGill and George Moffat, the latter two members of the Legislative Council. The struggle for political dominance in the thirties and forties turned cultural in the fifties, with the creation of Bishops University in the Eastern Townships, Christ Church Cathedral, Mount Royal Cemetery, the Protestant Orphan Asylum, and the expansion of the Montreal General Hospital and McGill University. With the exception of McGill University, John Samuel played a central role in bringing all of these projects to fruition. Adapting the ancient Greek model of the civic patriarch to the nineteenth-century colonial context, John Samuel enjoyed a highly successful public life built on service to the community both in his role as Superior Court judge and as an Anglican philanthropist.

When David McCord entered municipal politics in the 1870s he was following the lead of the newly elected mayor, William Hingston, a surgeon who had entered municipal politics to try to reform public policy on hygiene.⁴⁸ With the zeal of a reformer, David McCord quickly involved himself in a number of committees at city hall but most notably the Health committee which he soon

⁴⁶ See J.J. Day in entry on Charles-Seraphim Rodier, *DCB Vol. X*, p. 625.

⁴⁷ See Brian Young, *The Politics of Codification. The Lower Canadian Civil Code of 1866* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's Press, 1994).

⁴⁸ C. V. Marsolais, L. Desrochers, and R. Comeau, ed., *Histoire des maires de Montréal* (Montréal: VLB Editeur, 1993), pp. 108-113. Dr. William Hingston was a friend of John Samuel McCord's. In the fly-leaf of his book *The Climate of Canada and its Relation to Life and Health*, published in 1884, Dr. Hingston wrote: "To D.R. McCord Esq. To whose father the writer is indebted for having his attention directed to the subject of this volume, 8 August, 1885, quoted in Pam Miller et al. *The McCord Family: A Passionate Vision* (Montreal: McCord Museum, 1992), p. 65.

headed.⁴⁹ Having come to city hall with the idea of improving public health, David quickly encountered obstacles in the form of special interest groups and sectarian politics rooted in language and social class which refused to yield to the ideas of a young, English-speaking, lawyer from the western side of the Mountain. By the 1870s French speakers representing a variety of backgrounds had already become the majority on council.⁵⁰ When David McCord tried to live out his father's ideals of high civic mindedness, what he encountered were the politics of self-interest. John Samuel's involvement in local institution building was not without its personal motivations however. What set his situation apart from that of his son's, were changes to the decision-making process.⁵¹ John Samuel's contributions to local institution building had been devised among a small group of friends who came from the same social class, practiced the same religion, spoke the same language, and whose civic projects were not subject to the scrutiny of the democratic process. The situation David Ross McCord encountered a generation later was different. His authority was tied to the waning fortunes of a social class whose influence on city politics was in decline.⁵²

With a career in municipal politics already tried and abandoned, and having broken with familial expectations over his marriage to Letitia Chambers (his sisters disapproved of the marriage), David McCord began to pay more attention to what he would later identify as his life work: the conservation of the Canadian past. In the mid-1880s, David McCord began to patronize a former British military painter by the name of Henry Bunnett whom he commissioned to make a series of sketches and paintings depicting historical scenes in and around Montreal, Three Rivers, and the Quebec City area. Concerned that many of

⁴⁹ See Michael Farley et al., "Les commencements de l'administration Montréalaise de la santé publique (1865-1885), *Journal of the History of Canadian Science, Technology and Medicine*, No. 20, pp. 24-46.

⁵⁰ Marsolais, et al., pp. 117-118.

⁵¹ Michèle Dagenais argues that the history of Montreal municipal government, since the 1860s, has been marked by a move toward greater democratization. In 1874, amendments to the electoral law instituted an electoral list. Vote by secret ballot was introduced in 1889 along with the measure giving unmarried women and widows the right to vote if they owned property. See Michèle Dagenais, *La démocratie à Montréal. De 1850 à nos jours* (Montréal: Ville de Montréal, 1992), pp. 7, 16-24.

⁵² See Harold Kaplan, *Reform, Planning and City Politics: Montreal, Winnipeg, Toronto* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982), p. 312.

Canada's historical landmarks might not survive the century, David Ross McCord hired Bunnett to make a visual record of the buildings and the landscapes he felt were significant for the telling of the Canadian story. Together they travelled around the Quebec countryside, with David McCord sketching and Bunnett transforming his sketches into oil paintings and watercolours.⁵³ Their collaboration produced some three-hundred images that became the foundation of David Ross McCord's historical collection. Writing in 1918, David McCord boasted: "Until I made and inspired the whole of this series – there had not been any historical or campaign pictures relating to Canada. Nowhere in the world does there exist such pictures uniting knowledge of history with graphical skill...."⁵⁴

Initially, David Ross McCord saw history as a series of historical tableaux. Although one-dimensional in their presentation, the paintings led him back to his father's passion for landscape painting. Influenced by the inventory sciences, the paintings he commissioned from Bunnett were not just works of art but an inventory of lost places or potentially lost places. Where his father paid for landscapes to be painted of what was contemporary to his life, David McCord's gaze was turned towards the past. John Samuel had hired James Duncan to paint scenes from Temple Grove, his beloved home, his creation. David McCord on the other hand hired Bunnett to paint scenes from his ancestors' past. Both were documenting what they valued most. Why did David McCord choose landscape painting over the photograph? Why Bunnett rather than Henderson – the landscape photographer whom he had commissioned to photograph his family's houses a decade before? In the 1880s, photography still lacked the prestige associated with oil painting.⁵⁵ Or, he might have been motivated in his choice of medium by a desire to exercise his own skills at architectural drawing. However, more importantly, with painting and his collaboration with Bunnett, he was able to have more control over the final result, which more accurately reflected his vision of reality.

⁵³ DRM's sketchbooks are found in the McCord Museum's reserves. They contain over five hundred entries, most of which are of historical scenes and architectural details, but not exclusively so.

⁵⁴ MCFP, file #2075, "Wolfe's Cove," DRM, August 13, 1918.

There were other artists who included old buildings in their landscapes or in their scenes of everyday life in British North America, James Duncan among them, John Samuel's favourite artist, but none went about it so systematically and with the idea of 'saving the landmarks'. It is interesting to compare the works of Bunnett with that of James Duncan who was commissioned by John Samuel to paint Montreal landscapes. Duncan lived and worked in Montreal and his subject matter reflects this singular focus. But what distinguishes him from Bunnett are his paintings of street scenes which capture ordinary and not so ordinary people going about their daily business. There are no human figures in Bunnett's painting; nature yes, but no human nature. David McCord was not interested in saving the present for posterity. What mattered and what he wished to retain were the remnants of Empire, preferably the English, but the French colonial empire would do. Duncan's drawings on the other hand captured both the buildings and the activities of nineteenth-century Montreal prior to Confederation. But what distinguished Bunnett's work from most other artists, including Duncan, was that it was actually copied from sketches made by the person who commissioned the work, in this case David McCord. According to David McCord, it was he who dictated not only the subject of Bunnet's pieces, but the angles and the actual lines drawn. David McCord used Bunnet as if he were his own paint-brush. (Figures 3 – 4)

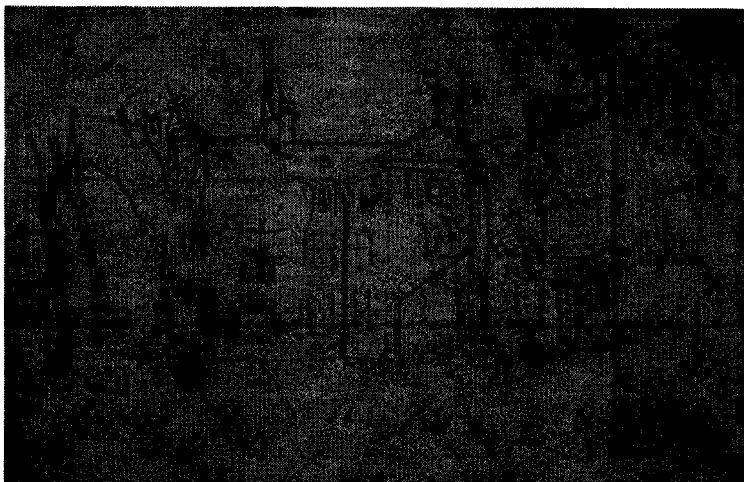
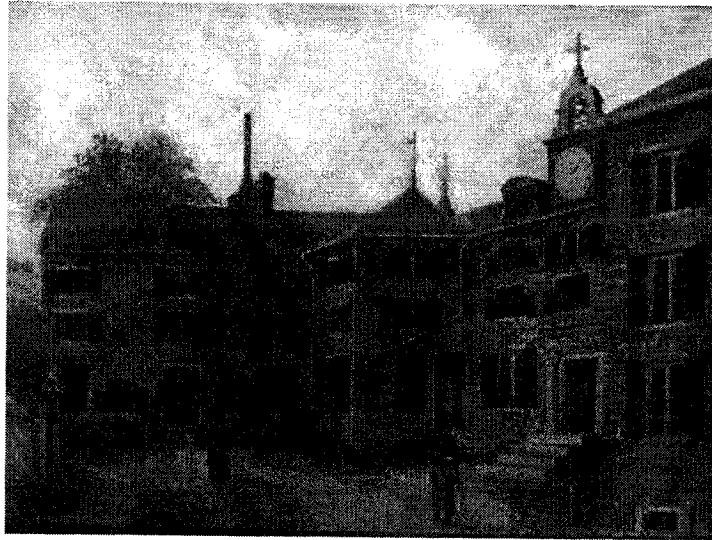


Figure 3, Untitled sketch by David Ross McCord (M989x.161.5), McCord Museum)

⁵⁵ Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: Dell, 1973, 1974, 1977), pp. 51-53.

**Figure 4,
Seminary of St.
Sulpice, Mtl. by
Bunnett, (M650
McCord
Museum)**



Near the end of the 1880s, David Ross McCord began to keep what he referred to as his historical notebooks, a collection of quotations and clippings from historical journals and newspapers interspersed with personal commentary. Volume one was begun in the back of one of his father's science notebooks. These notebooks are the only sustained record of his thoughts on history, but even at that, most of the entries consist of quotations from other people's work. Both these practices, journal writing and collecting paintings of Canadian landscapes were activities John Samuel had initiated, but in David McCord's hands, they became the basis for his life work of creating a museum of national history.

There were other memorials to his father and the McCord family, but the most extravagant by far was the McCord National Museum. By including a McCord Room in his museum, David McCord was also trying to right history by rewriting 'the family romance'. Part family history, part national history, the two were often entwined, the 'family romance' constructed with his objects, told the story of the McCord family whose successes on the battlefield and in the courtroom had made them an important Canadian legal and military dynasty, but one to which he and he alone was the legitimate heir. In Freud's article "Family Romances" the family romance is defined in a second way, one that received far less attention. According to Freud, children used their imaginations in an attempt to rewrite family scripts which "rob[bed] those born before of their prerogatives –

in a way which reminds one of historical intrigues..."⁵⁶ In the McCord Museum, the final version of the story, David McCord had succeeded in eliminating all mention of his siblings.

In 1921, when the exhibition was first mounted, David McCord's younger sister Annie was still alive although his older sister and brother had been dead for over fifty years by this point. The truth was David McCord had never been his father's favourite child. His sister Annie, the youngest, the family 'pet' was the one who occupied that place in her father's affections. A sheaf of Valentines sent to Annie from her father attest to the fact.

Annie mine
I do pine
All the time
I'm far from you;
There is not bliss
There is not kiss
Both I miss
When far from you.⁵⁷

III

The master trope of the McCord family history was transmission, the transmission of cultural, economic, and social capital from one generation to the next. How the family fortune was transmitted to the next generation is the subject of this section. To whom the benefits accrued played a determining role in the choices made by David Ross McCord, especially in relation to the McCord museum with which the thesis is concerned.⁵⁸ Don Fyson, in his introduction to "Rich Man, Poor Man, Beggar Man...Thief?", makes an obvious but often missed point that the wealth and success of individuals is inseparable from the wealth and financial strategies of the families from which they came. In David Ross's case there would have been no McCord Museum if he had not managed to take control

⁵⁶ Freud, "Family Romances," p. 240.

⁵⁷ MCFP, file #1206, "Rhymes from John Samuel McCord to Anne McCord, 1852-1859," undated.

⁵⁸ Most of the information in this chapter on the McCord family's finances comes from an excellent unpublished article by Don Fyson, "Rich Man, Poor Man, Beggar Man...Thief? Four Generations of McCord Family Wealth, 1760-1930," Montreal, 1991.

of his parents' legacy, which he then used to finance his collecting. The strategies he employed to achieve this end were strategies adopted from previous generations of male McCords, and as such, form a less tangible, but no less significant part of his family's inheritance.

The emotional costs of this strategy, however, were steep. David McCord's management style with regards to the family inheritance was such that it eventually led to his estrangement from both his siblings. The most tragic instance was that of his younger brother Robert Arthur. His death at the age of thirty-six, in a rooming house in a distressed section of Montreal, came after a bitterly contested court case during which he had accused his brother David of trying to swindle him of his share of their parents' legacy. Anne McCord took longer to become alienated, but she too came to realize that David's use of the family legacy, especially in relation to the McCord Museum, was not in her best interests. "I am not leaving the McCord Museum any money..." she was quoted as saying.⁵⁹ Although a supporter of the museum, near the end of her life she took the unprecedented step of excluding David, her only surviving sibling, from her will.

The first McCord fortune made in Canada was associated with John McCord Senior and his eldest son, John Junior. Both father and son made their money as import/export merchants. John McCord Senior had emigrated to Quebec from Ireland with his young family in the wake of the British takeover of North America in 1759. In Ireland he worked as a grain merchant, but in North America he began to supply the British Army with alcohol and other goods. Once he arrived, he became aware of the lucrative commercial opportunities opened up by the withdrawal of the French merchants from Quebec. "John McCord Sr. fit perfectly the traditional image of the British merchant in Quebec, perhaps best enunciated by Donald Creighton: united by the 'single, simple objective of making money by trade', marrying politics with commerce and clamouring for liberalism in both, and strongly Protestant."⁶⁰ He was not an unqualified success

⁵⁹ MCFP, file #1214 Miss Anne McCord Estate, Tylee Lighthall correspondence, to W. D. Lighthall from Arthur Tylee, February 27, 1929.

⁶⁰ Fyson, "Rich Man, Poor Man, Beggar Man... Thief?" p. 4.

as a merchant. At the beginning of the 1790s, in an effort to stave off bankruptcy and the forced sale of his properties, John Senior transferred all of his assets to his eldest son, John Junior, and then retired from business. When he died in Montreal at his son Thomas' home he was virtually bankrupt.

John Junior continued in his father's business but with more success. A more prudent manager, in the first five years after his father's near bankruptcy he made good on all the outstanding debts originally accumulated by his father. When he died in 1822, his estate was worth £13,000. Childless at the time of his death, he left £500 to his younger brother Thomas; £1250 to Mary McCord, Thomas' daughter, who had taken care of him; and most of the rest of the estate to his sister Margaret McCord, wife of the fur trader Josiah Bleakley. On the surface it appeared that the bulk of the estate belonged to Margaret, but as we shall see, in the long run this would prove less important than the fact that Thomas had been named executor.

David Ross McCord's grandfather, Thomas McCord, began his working life as a small merchant. As the second son of John Senior, he could not count on a place in his father's business. Forced to seek his fortune elsewhere, he left Quebec City for Montreal, where he became involved with the Montreal Distillery Company along with a number of important fur-trading merchants, including Todd & McGill and Levy Solomons (whose daughter became Thomas's second wife), and the largest retail-wholesale grocers in Montreal, Forsyth and Richardson. Despite the favourable economic climate caused by the large influx of Loyalist settlers to Quebec, the venture proved to be a disaster. The Montreal company could not survive the competition provided by cheaper English and Caribbean alcohol and eventually went under. Poorer but wiser, Thomas began to diversify his business dealings, investing in wood contracts and small lots in the newly opened Eastern Townships adjacent to Montreal. During this period in the 1790s he made the two most important business decisions of his life when he leased, first the Nazareth Fife of 100 arpents from the sisters of the Hôtel Dieu, and then in the following year, an area of 10 arpents referred to as Ste. Anne (later known as Griffintown) from the Congregation of Notre Dame. Situated beyond

the western gate of the city, the land remained largely agricultural and pastoral until it became the site of Canada's industrial revolution in the 1850s. It was rent from these properties that made Thomas a wealthy man.

Thomas's change of fortune took decades to realize. Bankruptcies continued to haunt him, and in 1796 he was forced to leave Montreal for Ireland where he hoped to arrange the sale of family property. A deteriorating political situation prevented him from disposing of his assets but provided him with an opportunity to participate in the Irish conflict on the side of the British. A return to trade was followed by another bankruptcy, this time forcing him to lease his residence, the 'Grange des Pauvres' and other small parcels of land. Thomas returned to Montreal in 1805 with the intention of regaining control over his Montreal properties, which in his absence had been leased in their entirety to the Griffins. A decision by the Privy Council in his favour in 1814 left him with title to property that had already been subdivided for development.

The Privy Council decision rescued a career that had been lacklustre at best. It was a dramatic reversal, the consequences of which would endure for the rest of his life. Almost overnight his income doubled. The £278 Thomas received each year as police magistrate was quickly surpassed by the revenues generated from his properties. Rents in 1814 amounted to £400. In 1840, they would rise to close to £3,000. When Thomas leased the Nazareth Fief in the 1790s, it showed little potential for development. The land was swampy and often flooded in spring, an area most Montrealers saw as unsuitable for housing or for agriculture.⁶¹ Thomas's motivation for leasing the land, it appears, had less to do with financial gain, and more to do with satisfying his seigneurial pretensions. In the large stone farmhouse known as *Grange des pauvres*, built in the French style, he lived the life of a gentleman farmer, cultivating an extensive garden and winery, but renting out the adjacent mill.

While the Griffins briefly held the lease to the land, they increased its value by subdividing it into lots. Thomas continued their practice as well as

⁶¹ Pam Miller et al., *The McCord Family: A passionate vision* (Montreal: McCord Museum, 1992), pp. 33-37.

seeking to increase his holding by negotiating additional leases from the Hôtel Dieu.⁶² As police magistrate and member of the legislative assembly, Thomas was well placed to influence important decisions that would affect the future earning potential of his properties. Participating in the assembly's debate over the proposed route of the Lachine Canal was probably the most flagrant example of Thomas's ethically dubious talent for combining self-interest with public office.

Comfortable in his recently acquired status as urban rentier, Thomas embarked upon the costly project of building a luxury home on Nazareth Fief (otherwise known as Griffintown). It was an enormous expense, one that forced Thomas to borrow heavily. Between 1818 and 1824, he contracted a series of loans to pay for the house and furnishings, which after interest payments added another £6,600 to his debts. Thomas's *nouveau riche* sensibilities were given full rein in his choice of Gothic, the most up-to-date style in housing design coming from England. Thomas ordered "Gothic head door frames, ribs for Gothic Groined Ceiling for Entrance door Way, a New Gothic headed Window for Room over Wash-house, and Gothic head'd Windows" for his new manor house.⁶³ In choosing Gothic detailing for his new residence in place of the French colonial architecture of his previous dwelling, Thomas, a committed anglophile, was also making an important political statement. Unlike his father, who had been branded a traitor by the British governor Guy Carleton for his pro-American sympathies, Thomas identified strongly with the British. The house itself cost almost £2000 and took four years to build. In 1823, just a year before Thomas McCord's death, the builders Clarke and Appleton presented him with the final invoice.

Inside, the house offered all the trappings of a genteel household. There was a large library stocked with books, and imported china from England for the table settings. The contrast with the Ross house where Anne Ross grew up, however, is revealing of the class differences that separated the two families. Both establishments aspired to a genteel lifestyle, but the Rosses managed it on a much grander scale. David Ross's taste ran to the classical. His cut stone mansion, the

⁶² Ibid, p. 39.

⁶³ MCFP, file #0257, Bills and receipts, 1806-1824.

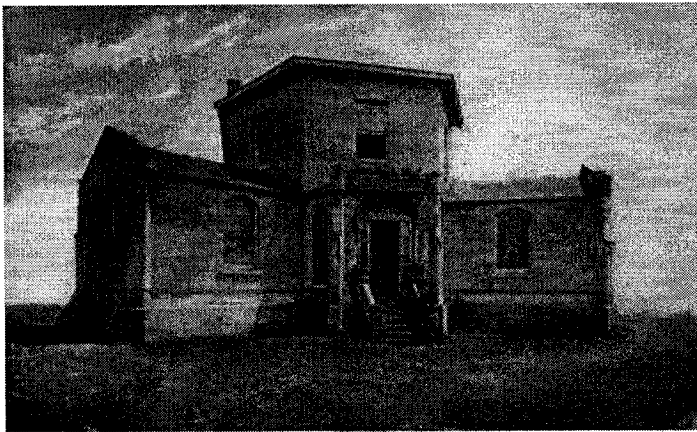
first of its kind in Montreal, was built on the fashionable Champ-de-Mars.⁶⁴ Thomas McCord on the other hand had built his Gothic pile near a swamp in the decidedly unfashionable Griffintown.⁶⁵ Ross saw his four story grey-stone as competing with similar houses in London. Thomas McCord's pretensions were on a more modest scale. Local craftsmen satisfied his tastes, with the exception of the china.

The final outcome, judged by the only surviving photograph of Thomas's house, was not especially pleasing to the eye.

David Ross McCord commissioned the picture, taken by Alexander Henderson, a Montreal landscape photographer, at the beginning of the 1870s. In the Henderson picture (Figure 5),

Figure 5, The Grange, Thomas McCord's house, Montreal, 1872, the Henderson album (MP 000033.6) McCord Museum)

David Ross McCord, in top hat and frock coat, stands next to the steps of an odd looking six-sided structure with abutting wings. What makes the scene all the more incongruous is the absence of a background. David McCord had Henderson block out the surrounding factories, which by the time the photograph was taken dominated the Griffintown landscape.



⁶⁴ Miller et al, *McCord Family*, p. 69.

⁶⁵ See Kathleen Jenkins, *Montreal Island of the St Lawrence* (New York: Doubleday, 1966), pp. 254-255 and P.F.W. Rutherford introduction, Herbert Ames, *The City Below the Hill* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1972), p. xii. According to David Marvin, "A History of Griffintown," unpublished paper (Montreal: McCord Museum, no date), pp. 1-9, "It was never an ideal place to live. The land was low-lying and when the St. Lawrence River went into flood, the streets of Griffintown were rivers too," p. 2.

In his lifetime, Thomas McCord had achieved affluence and a social position that far exceeded that of his father. Surrounded by all the trappings of wealth, a mansion filled with imported china, rich furnishings and a large library, Thomas lived out the last few years of his life as an urban rentier, living well beyond his means. Credit procured through the management of his late brother John's estate helped finance his extra spending. In a strategy that would be copied by his grandson David Ross McCord, Thomas took control of his brother's estate, the majority of which was left to his sister and Thomas's daughter, and mismanaged the inheritance to his own advantage by delaying payment to his sister and daughter. A career as a small merchant, manufacturer, landlord, and honourable member of the assembly for Bedford that had been marked by a series of reversals, ended in yet another, when a year before his death he was relieved of his post as police magistrate for alleged abuses.⁶⁶

From the position of a younger son from an indebted mercantile family, with no personal capital to speak of, Thomas made himself rich by shrewdly using the civil law in court cases, sheriff's sales, and seizures, and by accumulating income from the exploitation of property, the use of credit, and his judgeship. What is important to note is how he went about making his money, for the strategies he employed were far removed from those of his father and elder brother. Even his politics had changed: while his father had been passionately pro-American, Thomas, by 1814, was telling British authorities to send food and other supplies to the Indians, to prevent them from siding with the Americans.

The estate Thomas left to his two sons, John Samuel and William King, was deeply indebted. Under the provisions of Thomas's will, the two sons were to inherit equally, yet the conditions imposed by the nature of their inheritance, a collection of land leases, defied simple division. Less fortunate was their half sister Mary, who was excluded entirely from the will. Conflict was almost inevitable given the circumstances. Thomas McCord acknowledged the difficulty his will imposed. In the document he wrote, "this I trust they will do as Brethren

⁶⁶ Elinor Senior, "Thomas McCord", *Canadian Dictionary of Biography*, Vol. V, p. 434.

as I cannot now say how it can be done.”⁶⁷ For the next twenty years the finances of John Samuel and William King remained inextricably entwined, much to the dissatisfaction of both parties. It was a situation that would decide the course of their adult relationship. The pattern of inheritance set down by Thomas McCord would also cast its shadow on David Ross McCord’s generation. Following the death of his parents and faced with similar circumstances of an estate that was impossible to divide, David McCord adopted many of the same strategies his father and grandfather had employed before him, and to the same end.

John Samuel was a couple of years older than his brother William and already practicing law at the time of his father’s death. Having managed the estate during his father’s illness, there was the presumption that John Samuel would continue to do so, especially since brother William was headed for divinity studies at Cambridge. With his prolonged absence in the offing, William King signed a power of attorney giving John Samuel full control over their joint assets. A pattern soon emerged which involved John Samuel managing the estate for his own benefit and William King living well beyond his means. Over the years John Samuel was frequently called upon to rescue William King from his financial crises. In 1836, the situation had deteriorated to such an extent that William King fled to Europe, leaving behind his wife, children, and a debt of over £2700. John Samuel stepped in to provide support to his sister-in-law, but he balked at providing any money to his spendthrift brother. It was only the intervention of a mutual family friend that pushed him to act. On this occasion, the consequences to William King were particularly onerous. Punitive measures followed. John Samuel demanded compensation in the form of all of William King’s household furnishings, his law library, and all debts owed to him. In an attempt to find a solution to his brother’s unending financial crisis, John Samuel secured a judgeship for William King in 1839 that paid £300 a year.⁶⁸ Five years later and still plagued with financial difficulties, William King sold his share of the McCord estate to John James Day, a neighbour of his brother’s, for £8000, thus

⁶⁷ Fyson, “Rich Man, Poor Man, Beggar Man...Thief?”, p. 24.

⁶⁸ *Ibid*, p. 27.

putting an end to their financial partnership, and to William King's financial woes.

By the time William King sought to sever all financial connections with his brother, the damage had already been done. The forced nature of their economic partnership had not fostered the brotherly love their father had counted on in his will. On the contrary, the inheritance had been the cause of much bitterness between the brothers. In a letter addressed to John Samuel, William King wrote: "You assume to yourself generosity... I regret you should touch upon that as it recalls to mind your gestion of the estate and your conduct to me ever since the death of our worthy parent; had that Estate been managed as it ought to have been things would not be in the state in which they [are]."⁶⁹ The blame, of course, travelled both ways. The gulf between the two brothers opened up by John Samuel's high-handedness and William King's irresponsibility was only breached at William King's deathbed. Their conflict was fuelled by the financial situation, however family dynamics are rarely so simple.

The brothers shared the same parents and the same profession, but otherwise behaved quite differently. John Samuel had all the attributes of an older brother: responsible, ambitious, and hardworking. He also showed a talent for turning difficult situations to his own advantage. In his twenties, John Samuel transformed Thomas McCord's deeply indebted estate into an important source of income which permitted him and his brother William King to live beyond the means of a circuit court judge. Marriage to Anne Ross, the eldest daughter of David Ross, advocate general and one of the wealthiest landowners in Montreal, gained him entry into the upper reaches of colonial society. Even his participation as commander of the Montreal loyalist militia during the Rebellions of 1837-38, an insurrection aimed at overturning the British presence in Quebec, became an opportunity for career advancement.

Less is known about William King, but a daguerreotype taken of him in middle age suggests a man whose life was shaped by its excesses. He looks much

⁶⁹ MCFP, file #0428, William King to John Samuel, May 9, 1844. William King later retracted these accusations, and thanked his brother for all the support he had given. Quoted in Fyson, "Rich Man, Poor Man, Beggar Man...Thief?" p. 29.

older than his forty-seven years: his eyes are clouded and spectacles hang suspended from around his neck. But it is his nose and the broken blood vessels on his cheeks that suggest he was a serious drinker. William King fit more closely the stereotype of the rebellious youngest son. Alcohol and a weakness for gambling may have prevented him from achieving the kind of success his brother enjoyed in public life, but other circumstances may also have contributed. Some of John Samuel's influence was derived from his relationship to the establishment church, Christ Church. William King, on the other hand, identified more with his mother's family, who were Jewish. During the years he spent in Quebec City, William King maintained a relationship with his cousin on his mother's side, Abraham Joseph. In a tragic story recounted in Anne Joseph's history of the Joseph family, Aurelia Felicite Arnoldi, the wife of William King, was at the Josephs' looking after their new born when, in an attempt to soothe the baby's colic, she accidentally administered a fatal dose of Laudanum to the child.⁷⁰ The Solomonses, who were related to the Josephs, were a Jewish merchant family who had come to Quebec right after the Conquest about the same time as the McCords. Motivated by a similar desire to profit from the needs of a standing army, both the McCords and the Solomonses set themselves up as provisioners. Sarah Solomons, Thomas's second wife and the mother of John Samuel and William King, was the eldest daughter of Levy Solomons, a fur trader and business partner of Thomas's. Sarah died when William King was nine. Her sister Jessy continued to live with the family, probably as their housekeeper. Years later when Jessy Joseph died, John Samuel, by then middle-aged himself, pasted her death notice in his diary without comment. He does not mention whether he attended the funeral or not.

After William King withdrew from the partnership with his brother, John Samuel continued to extract a large profit from the leased lands on Nazareth Fief. Revenues generated from the properties they had once held in common matched his income as a judge, which by 1855 was £650. John Samuel differed significantly from his brother and from his father in the way he managed money. Both had added to their incomes by using credit. John Samuel apparently took his

⁷⁰ Anne Joseph, *Heritage of a Patriarch* (Sillery: Editions du Septentrion, 1995), p. 145.

own advice to heart and used credit sparingly. Having experienced first hand the problems associated with being heir to a heavily mortgaged legacy, John Samuel worked hard to reduce the amount of debt his children would have to contend with.

When John Samuel died in 1865, his estate was divided up among his five surviving children, Jane Catherine, John Davidson, David Ross, Robert Arthur, and Anne, with usufruct of the entire estate to his wife Anne Ross. John Samuel's decision to give his wife control over the entire estate was an unusual one, according to family historian Bettina Bradbury. In her research on women widowed in the 1830s, Bradbury found that "Montreal's anglophone elite behaved like wealthy male testators in Common Law jurisdictions, ensuring that after their deaths, business matters would be men's responsibility."⁷¹ In another departure from his father's example, John Samuel left an additional £1000 to his two daughters in recognition of the added burden on the estate from giving his three sons a professional education. Thinking ahead to the day when the Nazareth Fief would no longer be under their control, John Samuel included another proviso which stipulated that a quarter of the rents be put in a special fund to help replace the revenues which would be lost when the 99 year lease expired. The loss of John Samuel's professional income was a serious blow to the family economy, especially since none of the sons had established themselves in a viable profession. John Davidson's medical practice had gone bankrupt, leaving him with a number of debts; David Ross was still clerking in a law firm; and Robert Arthur had just received his commission in the army. To make up for the loss of income, it was decided to sell Temple Grove. Writing to David who was vacationing at Rivière du Loup, Anne Ross slips in a mention of Temple Grove's impending sale. "Our dear Letti is to mail this, and call at Notman's for the Photographs this PM. You will find Temple Grove advertised in the Daily Gazette I send you today. We all unite in most affectionate love to you..."⁷² Since they were unable to sell the property

⁷¹ Bettina Bradbury, "Widows Negotiate the Law: The First Year of Widowhood in Early-Nineteenth-Century Montreal," *Negotiating Identities in 19th- and 20th-Century Montreal*, ed. Bettina Bradbury and Tamara Myers (Vancouver & Toronto: UBC Press, 2005), p. 130.

⁷² MCFP, file #1810, Anne Ross McCord to DRM, August 20, 1867.

for the price they wanted, the family turned to credit, placing a \$1000 mortgage on Temple Grove, a practice which would later become the mainstay of David McCord's financial strategy.

While Anne Ross was still alive, she was in charge of managing the estate on behalf of her children. According to Don Fyson she did so in a consensual manner: "...the decisions that were taken between 1865 and 1870 regarding the management of the estate all had a strong flavour of being done for the good of the family, rather than to benefit its individual members."⁷³ Following her death in 1870, as control of the estate increasingly fell into David's hands, the difference in their management styles became obvious. Even prior to her death there were signs that David would follow a very different course. An incident involving his elder brother, John Davidson, revealed David's lifelong indifference to the consequences of his inaction, even when these could be quite serious.

John Davidson, the eldest son, had moved to the Eastern Townships in the spring of 1864 to set up a medical practice. After a stay of only a few months at Nelsonville, he returned that fall to Temple Grove, penniless, his material assets (medical books and instruments) threatened with seizure by his creditors. After their father's death, David began to act for his brother in legal matters. Asked to make good on John Davidson's debts by a lawyer who was representing one of his brother's creditors, David stubbornly refused to pay despite the threat of legal action and appeals to family honour. In March of 1866, just two months before John Davidson's death, David Ross received a letter from the lawyer Edson Kemp, reprimanding him for his lackadaisical handling of his brother's affairs.

... for Three times the amount of Fees I might receive were I to institute the action in question - I would not do so, could I in any fair means avoid it - simply from the position your late Father held in our District - to say nothing of the esteem he held therein in his private character as a Gentleman, and of which his family ought and should be proud - It is from these considerations I am induced to speak thus plainly to you...⁷⁴

By 1867, David was also managing his younger brother's money. Prior to his departure with the British army, Robert Arthur had signed a power of attorney

⁷³ Fyson, "Rich Man, Poor Man, Beggar Man... Thief?", p. 32.

giving David full control over his share of the inheritance. Again in 1870, this time on the eve of departing for India, Robert Arthur wrote a letter to his brother in which he reaffirmed his desire to have David manage his affairs. "I will do everything in my power to assist you in transacting things just as you wish... If you got ill now what an awful thing it would be, as I have no head for business at all."⁷⁵

Dear David, Many thanks for your remittance which was very welcome. for all news I must refer you to Mothers letter which I send by this mail. I yesterday got a tick from Anderson the tailor accompanied by a very civil and polite note requesting payment. The articles as you will see are the blanket coat, and _____ 2 pairs of Regt. trousers which I got just one year ago and for which he never once dunned me. Oh remarkable instance of a civil tailor! However to come to the point, if you would kindly go to the shop and tell him from me that I am hard up this month, but will certainly try to send him his money in Feb. I would have been able doubtless to have settled it now, but since I have been on the sick list I have had so many expenses, with wine (& other things ordered me that the exchange is very low indeed and "Job's turkey could not be much worse". However this could not have been foreseen so next month will put all square the affair. The man Anderson certainly deserves to be patronized as he works on the English Principle.⁷⁶

At nineteen Robert Arthur was already following in his uncle's footsteps, treating David like William King had treated John Samuel, making frequent requests for small amounts of money to pay off his debts.

With a power of attorney from Robert Arthur and two sisters who, consistent with Victorian attitudes towards women and business, left management of their share of the estate to David, the estate had fallen entirely into David's hands by 1870. The McCord children held their middle brother in high esteem. Robert Arthur described him as being "a pride to all your family, and an example to the whole of Montreal," but David had trouble living up to their expectations. According to Donald Fyson, "If Thomas' gestion of the family fortune was characterized by a carefree use of credit, while John Samuel's by careful planning, David Ross' management of the estate in the period between 1870 and

⁷⁴ MCFP, file #1108, Edson Kemp to DRM, March 19, 1866.

⁷⁵ MCFP, file #1112, Robert Arthur McCord to DRM, January 15, 1867.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

1900 was marked above all by a remarkable inattention to legal obligations, often with costly consequences.”⁷⁷

David cost himself and his brother and sisters thousands of dollars by consistently defaulting on mortgage payments for Temple Grove and by being negligent when it came to registering deeds for properties on the Nazareth Fief. In the beginning, David’s incompetence might have been explained by a lack of experience, but as the years went by and there was no change, it was obvious that for whatever reasons, David had no interest in improving or even maintaining the estate they all shared. What made it more ironic was that estate management was one of the jobs he did for a living. After his two sisters moved from Temple Grove, their arrangement consisted of frequent calls to their brother for the funds needed to pay for running a household. Notes such as “Can I have five dollars for coal?” have been saved in the McCord Family Papers.

The neglect David displayed towards the family’s joint assets, which in Jane and Annie’s case was their only source of income, contrasted sharply with the amount of attention he paid to Robert Arthur and his share of the inheritance. In 1877, David was summoned to England on the pretext that his younger brother was ill and possibly dying. George Lewis, David’s brother-in-law who now lived in England, had already been contacted concerning Robert Arthur’s condition and had written back that he thought Robert might be in some serious trouble, but the type of trouble he referred to remained unnamed. “... to be candid with you, it looks to me as if he was mixed up in some great trouble. Since, I have been in Chester I have not had so much as a scratch of a pen from Robert and I am perfectly ignorant of his whereabouts, and doings. If you really intend to come over, to look after Robert, the sooner you do so, I should say, the better.”⁷⁸ In the middle of July 1877, David arrived in London to see Robert Arthur and consult with his physician. Writing to his fiancée, Letitia Chambers, back in Montreal: “He has had a narrow escape and in several ways thank God he has

⁷⁷ Fyson, “Rich Man, Poor Man, Beggar Man... Thief?”, pp.. 33-4. Punctuation and emphasis in the original.

⁷⁸ MCFP, file #1811, George Lewis to DRM, no date.

been saved.”⁷⁹ What disease Robert Arthur actually suffered from continued to remain a mystery. “He [the doctor] pronounces him in a state of considerable danger and that he must take great care. He is aware of the facts himself. This has made me feel very anxious and as I write I have a headache.”⁸⁰

What the facts were, David does not elaborate upon. David and the doctors believed that Robert Arthur’s health problems were related to an attack of typhoid fever he had suffered seven years before. However, in a letter to Letitia Chambers sent in the first week of August, he talks of his brother’s mental state.

I had a consultation on Sat. with an eminent medical man regarding my brother's health and the result is that he fears for his reason. Robert does not know this. I am to see this medical man in a week or few days when he may know more. You may imagine this increases my care. This he says is not unlikely to have been caused by an attack of typhoid fever my brother had some years ago-and should account for the peculiarity of much that he has done lately... I see my brother every day, in fact to do my duty to him which I am undertaking to do? It hampers me not a little and somewhat increases my expenses. I can not detect any change in him during the last few days which to my eye indicates loss of reason. His frail strength is very little. I have to keep him near me until I see the Dr. again.⁸¹

David must have had his doubts about his brother’s condition. There were veiled references to Robert Arthur’s ‘peculiar’ behaviour and insinuations about his ‘character’: “I do not think the good points in my brother’s character have been brought out during the last few years...”⁸² but he continued to refrain from saying anything conclusive about the nature of Robert Arthur’s problems to his fiancée. Privately however, he had already acted to deprive his brother of his share of the McCord family property.

At the end of July, while he was still recovering from his unnamed illness, Robert signed, in a shaky hand, at least three documents: one declared that Robert Arthur was satisfied with the management by David Ross, Anne and Jane, of their parents’ estate; another finalized the sale of Robert’s moveable portion of his late parents’ estate for “Four hundred and thirty-six dollars and a half currency of

⁷⁹ MCFP, file #1851, DRM to Letitia Chambers, July 1877.

⁸⁰ MCFP, file #1851, DRM to Letitia Chambers, August 17, 1877.

⁸¹ MCFP, file #1851, DRM to Letitia Chambers, August 6, 1877.

⁸² Ibid.

Canada" to Jane, Anne, and David; while the third (and not in the McCord archives) was a power of attorney made out to John Taylor.⁸³ Taylor, who was ostensibly working for Robert, was instructed to donate Robert Arthur's share of the estate to David McCord over the next three years. Robert Arthur signed the document thinking it was simply another power of attorney, similar to the one he had signed ten years earlier in consideration "of the love and affection" he had for his older brother David. Why David felt justified in taking advantage of his brother's weakened condition in this way is not immediately revealed in his letters to Letitia:

I was going to tell you what I have felt and done regarding my brother, but I will tell you all when we meet. It is so painful, that in justice to him all I hope will ___ be right. Last Sat. morning my heart was aching and I prayed so earnestly in the words "come unto me" and the following afternoon in St. Paul's the sermon was from the same text and It soothed me more than I can tell you.⁸⁴

A month passed before David was prepared to say anything more about his motivations but when he did, they centred on money: how much his brother was spending and on what, was the issue.

He has not acted as he should and has wasted a great deal of money, but I hope he is saved and I wish to look back on a difficult and painful duty as having been performed as I should like; if I were in the same position, my brother would have acted to me. I think I feel you know me and no one who does can say I have ever acted other than I represented myself to be - anyone stating such a thing to you, does not know me.⁸⁵

An obvious reading of this episode is that David cynically saw an opportunity to enrich himself at his brother's expense and decided to take, by questionable means, what he thought rightfully belonged to his sisters and himself. In David's mind, Robert Arthur had forfeited the right to his share by virtue of his debauched lifestyle, which had made excessive demands on the estate and placed the financial well-being of the whole family at risk. David was prepared to cut his brother off without a penny, something his father had never done to William King, despite being faced with similar circumstances.

⁸³ MCFP, file #1851, DRM to Letitia Chambers, July 28, 1877.

⁸⁴ MCFP, file #1851, DRM to Letitia Chambers, July 28, 1877.

David stayed on in England for another two months. By the end of his visit, Robert Arthur, whose health was better, was avoiding him completely. At some point David learned that his brother had married (Robert Arthur was only planning to at this point), and was deeply concerned about the impact this would have on his own inheritance.

My brother has not acted towards me as he should. I have done my duty as far as I could. He has got married without consulting me and I cannot obtain information regarding it. and as his property is involved with mine (and my sisters), it is absolutely essential to have information and satisfy myself now rather than later questions should be raised in the event of his death, which time may have passed and it may be impossible to prove or disprove. I regret to be obliged to write it, but I fear intemperate habits are at the base of all his illness. How his marriage puts a new aspect on the case, and he will now have to be in the hands of his wife, I ____ the case in the straight way I could. I told my brother that on his temperance depends his life, as he has injured a once splendid constitution as soon as I can satisfy myself regarding this marriage so as to apply to it our laws which bear upon the case.⁸⁶

At the time, David was contemplating marriage to Letitia Chambers, but saw no contradiction in keeping his plans secret from his brother. Letitia Chambers, who was employed as matron of the Montreal "Small Pox Hospital," had written David offering her services as a nurse. David had thought better of involving her even though her presence as a nurse would have given them an excuse to be together, a wish he exclaimed in most of his letters. "Thanks for your kind assurances of being ready to assist my brother. I know you would do that. I did not say anything to him regarding you. He expressed himself as much attached to me, and his ____ position and state of health was such that I said anything when on the subject."⁸⁷

Three years later Robert Arthur discovered what his brother had done. Furious at the deception, he returned to Montreal with his wife Mary Bone to launch a suit against David to recover his money.⁸⁸ Neither David (for obvious

⁸⁵ MCFP, file #1851, DRM to Letitia Chambers, August 23, 1877.

⁸⁶ MCFP, file #1851, DRM to Letitia Chambers, September 6, 1877. Punctuation and emphasis in the original.

⁸⁷ MCFP, file #1851, DRM to Letitia Chambers, September 11, 1877.

⁸⁸ Information concerning this case is found at the ANQM, Greffes de la Cour Supérieure, case #857.

reasons) nor his sisters welcomed his return. Robert and Mary were not invited to stay with any of the McCords, but instead lived in a rooming house in the seedier section of town, on St. Charles Borromée Street. Meanwhile Mary Bone had received news of her brother's death and her sister's illness. Desperate to return to England, but without the funds to do so, the couple's only recourse was to somehow find a way to extract the money that was legitimately theirs from the McCord estate. Aware of the urgency attached to their need to return home, and with the case still caught up in appeals, David McCord approached his brother to re-sign the original deed in exchange for tickets to England, several thousand dollars in cash, and about \$4000 for his share of the estate, which David would provide. Accompanied by his clerk and a notary, David showed up at his brother's rooms and convinced Robert Arthur, purportedly drunk, to sign. David McCord, who had no intention of honouring this agreement, went to the appeals court the next day and asked for Robert Arthur's case against him to be dismissed.

Accusations and counter accusations flew thick and fast between the brothers, some of which were aired in court. Robert Arthur claimed that he had been the unwitting victim of his brother's machinations to steal his share of the family estate. In the face of his brother's accusations, David maintained a position of equanimity, arguing that he was only trying to protect Robert Arthur and his wife Mary Bone from the consequences of their profligate behaviour. Financially ruined and without a circle of support to sustain him since Jane and Annie had sided with David, Robert Arthur agreed to cede his rights to his brother in exchange for \$2000 plus a £200 annuity.⁸⁹ On his death the annuity was to be paid to his widow until her death or remarriage. Robert Arthur did not have long to enjoy the money he had fought so hard to obtain. In November of 1882 he suffered a stroke and died. He was thirty-six years old. His body was carried from the rooming house on St. Charles Borromée Street to Christ Church Cathedral, the church he had attended as a child. Francis Fulford, the Anglican Bishop who had officiated at Robert Arthur's confirmation, had described Robert Arthur as "a

⁸⁹ Both dollars and pounds were currencies in use.

young man of good moral character, and strict integrity, and one who will be anxious to do his duty in whatever position he may be placed."⁹⁰

It was a tragic end, and one that was compounded by David's treatment of his sister-in-law after Robert's death. Mary Bone remained in Montreal; apparently she had no funds with which to travel, and was forced to ask Annie McCord to intercede on her behalf with her brother for money to pay for a return ticket to England. David showed no more generosity toward her than he had to his brother and offered no money. A letter sent from her landlord to David McCord requesting immediate payment for back rent attests to the poverty of her circumstances: "If she doesn't receive some money tomorrow she will be forced to leave. She must leave my house, she has not even a trunk, she has really nothing. Don't ask me to wait any longer I have had patience long enough."⁹¹ Mary Bone did eventually return to England where she lived out the rest of her life, leaving behind a paper trail of receipts for small amounts of money from her annuity and writs for non-payment taken out against David McCord, who continued to resist paying her until Mary Bone herself finally proposed to call it quits and suggested a lump sum payment instead.

Beginning with Thomas McCord, revenues from leased property and a knowledge of the law helped generations of McCord men to live lives of considerable comfort and ease. In the third generation, David Ross McCord perpetuated this pattern of combining law studies and land subdivision as a means to retain a hold on local levers of power and wealth. Like his father and grandfather before him, David McCord took up the practice of law and ended up controlling the family's assets. In many ways David McCord's experience came closest to resembling that of his grandfather Thomas, also a second son.

Thomas McCord lived out the last few years of his life as an urban rentier, living well beyond his means on credit obtained from his elder brother's estate. Similarly, David McCord took control of the family estate and mismanaged it to his own advantage. Most disadvantaged were his female relatives. Like his father,

⁹⁰ Pamela Miller, *McCord Family Papers, 1766-1945, Vol. I, Inventory* (Montreal: McCord1986), Robert Arthur McCord

⁹¹ MCFP, file #1113, Mr. Greaves to DRM, no date.

David Ross McCord couched his claim to a younger brother's share of the family estate in the language of protectiveness. Saving their younger brothers from themselves had become a family theme. Freud might have said that David Ross McCord was seeking to rationalize 'robbing his relatives of their 'prerogatives'.⁹² Additionally, in his 'family romance', David Ross McCord continued what he had manifested in his 1867 letter to his cousin, in using the law as a means of more firmly rooting his ascendancy in his crafted 'historical intrigue'.⁹³

In this chapter, I have discussed some of the possible psychological motivations behind David Ross McCord's efforts to establish a Canadian history museum. Using Freud's interpretation of romance as applied to the relationship between child and parent, I argue that McCord's desire to found a history museum later in life was, in part, motivated by a desire to be recognized as his father's true heir despite being the second son and fourth-born child. What this interpretation overlooks, however, is the significance of childlessness in McCord's life. In order to truly fulfill his father's legacy, David McCord would have had to reproduce the next generation of McCords. Having failed to do so meant that he had to find some alternative way of perpetuating the McCord name. For David Ross McCord, the 'precious objects' which he would spend his adult life collecting replaced, I believe, the more traditional indicators of human fertility: children. A potential victory over the forces of conflict which plagued McCord's inner life – his childlessness, his alcoholism, and his lack of success as a lawyer – was the promise the museum held in reserve.

⁹² Freud, *Collected Works*, p. 240.

⁹³ MCFP, file #1812, DRM to Mrs. Langdon Cheves, July 1, 1867.

Chapter Four: Re-membering Temple Grove

If environment, like Highlands of Scotland are credited with the production of certain habits of mind and sentiments it may not be unlikely that the position and the classic form of this the only place of abode I have known, under Providence have not been without their influences on my character.¹

-David Ross McCord

As we change and grow throughout our lives, our psychological development is punctuated not only by meaningful emotional relationships with people, but also by close, affective ties with a number of significant physical environments, beginning in childhood.²

-Clare Cooper Marcus

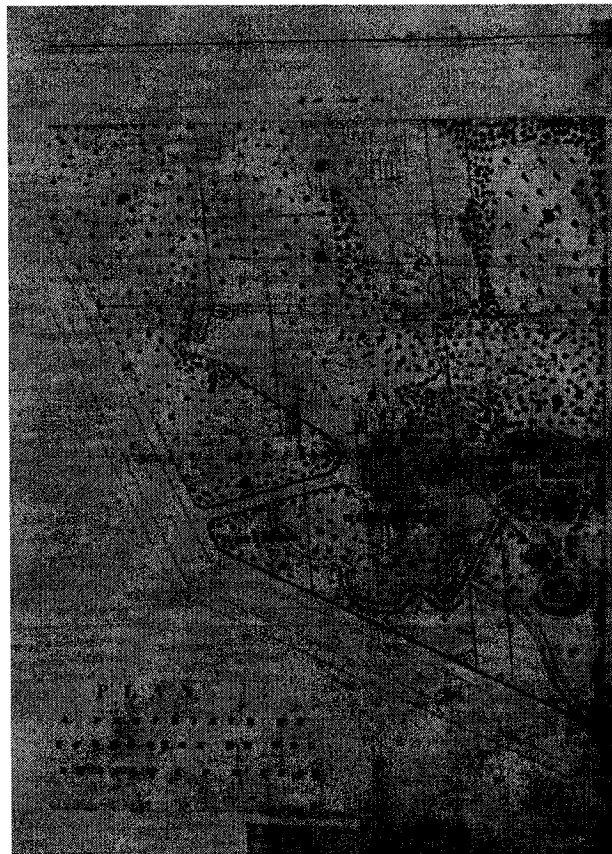


Figure 1, 'Plan de la Propriété de la Succession de L'Honorable J.S. McCord', 1866 by F.I.V. Regnaud

¹ MCFP, file#2065, 'Early Museum Accession Register', paintings and notes, DRM, August 15, 1916.

² Clare Cooper Marcus, *House as a Mirror of Self* (Berkeley: Conari Press, 1997), p. 2.

I like to think of David Ross McCord on his first day at Temple Grove, safely tucked in his father's arms, as he is carried over the threshold. Dark haired and rosy cheeked, at two months he already shows signs of a curious temperament. Captured in subsequent photographs, including the portrait of David McCord taken in his study at Temple Grove over seventy years later, is a gleam in the eye that promises to reveal the most about my subject. His father, John Samuel, is no longer young but his short plump features mimic the roundness of his son's babyhood. The May sun is brilliant overhead, an ideal day for a trip to the Mountain, a baby's first outing. A fresh breeze carries the scent of new growth mingled with the perfume of spring flowers. The mix weaves a kind of enchantment over the slopes of Mount Royal that on spring days like this elicits from travelers comparisons to the biblical Garden of Eden.

Imagining the scene thus helps me to balance what comes later: the losses, deceptions, and betrayals that frame this story of museum building. Most of what I know about my subject comes from letters, diaries, and documents generated by events that took place during the last decades of David McCord's life, years marked by illness and descent into dementia. In the absence of photographs and other hard evidence, imagining David McCord as an infant helps leaven an otherwise heavy portrait of decline. The archives are silent about this day, but for the purposes of David McCord's story it is an important rite of passage, a moment worthy of remembering.

Temple Grove was where memory first began for David Ross McCord. The fourth-born in a family of six children, he was the only one of his siblings to occupy the family home and gardens over an entire lifetime. As a result Temple Grove was woven into the very fabric of the historical narrative David McCord created for his museum. Memories are built around places. They generate them as well as contain them. "Theater of private life," writes Michelle Perrot, "scene of the most personal of learning experiences, and focus of childhood memories, the home is a fundamental place of commemoration in which our imaginations dwell

forever.”³ Similar to the memory palaces devised by classical orators who combined place and image to extend their memories, Temple Grove acted as McCord’s mnemonic template. Surrounded by the familiar objects and views of his childhood, Temple Grove was where the past was most present for David McCord, where recollection was made easy.

McCord’s narrative of Canadian origins was conceived in the private space of the home and was made manifest through the repetitive act of remembering. It was a highly personal history in that it consisted of people and places that held meaning for him. Historian Patrick Hutton makes the point that prior to the birth of modern historiography, memory was the ground of history: “The signature of modern historiography...was the arbitrary line it drew between public and private life. Such distinction was part of the modern temper, which identifies privacy with individual autonomy.”⁴ In the world in which David McCord grew up the line between public and private life was not so finely drawn. Politics was a gentleman’s game played out in the withdrawing rooms of places like Temple Grove. In lieu of modern recording devices, what attested to these events were the objects and the stories that they could evoke.

II

Temple Grove, the Greek Revival house and gardens situated on the southern flank of Mount Royal, began as a summer retreat for the McCord family. Following the birth of David Ross McCord in the spring of 1844, the mountain property became the family’s permanent residence. From the time of their marriage in 1832, John Samuel and Anne Ross McCord had lived in a house on St. James Street near Anne Ross’ parents. With four children under five and more babies anticipated, the McCords were concerned with the threat posed by cholera and typhus, two deadly diseases that thrived during the summer months in Montreal’s crowded streets. At a time when knowledge about contagious diseases

³ Michelle Perrot, ed. *A History of Private Life. From the Fires of Revolution to the Great War*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990), p. 357.

⁴ Patrick Hutton, *History as an Art of Memory* (Hanover, New Hampshire: University Press of New England, 1993), p. 98.

was less than perfect, sunshine and mountain air were considered to contain important properties which discouraged the spread of the contagion.

Prior to the cholera epidemic of 1832, people of means were content to build their main residences inside the area that had once been contained by the city walls.⁵ David Ross, Anne Ross McCord's father, a wealthy landowner and Advocate-General of Lower Canada, was part of this trend when, in 1813, he had the impressive classically-inspired mansion (mentioned in the previous chapter) constructed on the edge of the Champs-de-Mars parade ground for the Ross family. Two decades later, Montreal had grown in size, as had the distance between the old fortified city and the residences where the wealthy now chose to live. The cholera epidemic of 1832 had inspired an exodus to the countryside among people like the McCords who could afford the cost of building a villa.

Infectious diseases were one factor but so too was changing fashion as applied to residential architecture. The influence of the Romantic Movement, with its emphasis on the 'natural', also helped shape people's perceptions of the good life. Large landscaped gardens in the English style became an integral part of 'genteel' living. "[T]he garden marked the distinction between the farm, which exploited nature, and the suburban home, which celebrated it."⁶ One of John Samuel's main pastimes was designing an extensive garden on the land surrounding Temple Grove, a project which would have been impossible to carry out in the more restricted space available on St. James Street. The state of Montreal's streets, and the overcrowding of the city generally, was probably inducement enough, however, to locate further a field. Instead of working to improve the health of the city, a task David McCord and his generation of conservative urban reformers would take up with some zeal four decades later, John Samuel and his community chose to flee it.

Country houses were also important on a symbolic level. The choice of location, size, and design, were measures of the kind of social power their owners

⁵ The demolition of Montreal's fortifications began in the 1810s. France Gagnon-Pratte, *L'architecture et la nature à Québec au dix-neuvième siècle: les villas* (Québec: Ministère des affaires culturelles, 1980), p. 49.

⁶ Roderick MacLeod, "Salubrious Settings and Fortunate Families: The Making of Montreal's Golden Square Mile, 1840-1895," Ph.D. History, McGill University, 1997, p. 14.

aspired to. For those who sought positions of leadership in Lower Canada in the 1830s, land was still a potent symbol of having arrived at the pinnacle of colonial society. Although Montreal's first millionaires had made their fortune in furs and not in land, it did not stop them from moving to the countryside in imitation of the British gentry whose wealth was dependent on land. When John Samuel relocated to the slopes of Mount Royal, he was following the path of upward mobility trod by the fur barons McTavish and McGill, the first English-speakers to colonize the Mountain over thirty years before. John Samuel was well aware that land was not of much use if it was not built on. His own family's wealth had come from a collection of leases on land that had the good fortune to be in the path of Montreal's first industrial development. Building on the land that would become Temple Grove was a good investment, but the design John Samuel chose spoke volumes about the kind of life he desired to live there.⁷

John Samuel's choice of Greek Revival for his summer home was not an obvious one. Temple Grove was unique in Montreal's built environment.⁸ There were other examples of the Greek Revival style in the city at the time, most notably the Customs House and the Arts building of McGill University, but these were buildings intended for public use. Both structures were designed by John Ostell, but neither incorporated the characteristic three-sided structure with porticos on all three sides that made Temple Grove so distinctive. In 1835, Ostell was hired by the widow Gray to draw up plans to subdivide her property on Mount Royal in preparation for its sale. The corner lot, purchased that same year by John Samuel McCord, became Temple Grove. Did McCord consult Ostell about his own plans to build in the Greek style? At the time Ostell was busy constructing his first Greek Revival building, the Customs House.

⁷ Mark Girouard, *Life in the English Country House* (London: Yale University Press, 1978), p. 3.

⁸ Architectural historian Harold Kalman has written the following about Temple Grove in *A History of Canadian Architecture, Vol. I*. (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 303: "Temple Grove was a rare example in Canada of a Greek temple with porticos on three sides. True Greek temples possessed columns on all four sides, but in Canada where the colder climate made this impractical, the Roman temple-form, with a portico on one or both ends was the most popular."

In Conrad Graham's *Mont Royal. Early Plans and Views of Montreal*, Paul Adams is credited with designing Temple Grove,⁹ but it is likely John Samuel also had a hand in the process.¹⁰ There were few practicing architects in Montreal at the time and many builders relied on models found in various architectural handbooks and engravings then in circulation.¹¹ A competent draftsman in his own right, John Samuel had received drawing lessons as a child from Charlotte Berczy, the daughter of the well-known artist William Berczy.¹² In adulthood, he used the skill to amuse himself during the long hours when Court was in session, drawing caricatures of the people who came before him on the Bench. John Samuel's sketch books contain plans for the garden at Temple Grove, architectural details of the house including a design for the fence which was later constructed along its southern perimeter, as well as a drawing of the projected Protestant Orphan's Asylum building of which he was a patron.¹³

Building a house in the shape of a Greek temple with the main room exposed on three sides was a whimsical gesture, especially in Montreal's intemperate climate. In 1837 and 1838 when Temple Grove was being built, John Samuel was still negotiating his place among Montreal's governing elite. Temple Grove's distinctive shape and its location gave it the advantage of being an instant landmark. In the words of David McCord:

My father like all educated men of his day was brought up on the classics and he said to me -- 'I looked upon the site I had selected for my country home -- and its dominant position -- and said to myself the Greeks would

⁹ See Conrad Graham, *Mont Royal. Early Plans and Views of Montreal* (Montreal: McCord Museum, 1992).

¹⁰ In *Neoclassical Architecture in Canada* (Ottawa: Parks Canada, 1984), Leslie Maitland also names Paul Adams as the person responsible for the construction of Temple Grove.

¹¹ The first published document from John Ostell's career as an architect, surveyor, was "Sketch of property of the late John Gray esq.," signed John Ostell, land surveyor of the Province of Lower Canada. In this period there was no distinction made between surveyor and architect. See Ellen James's *John Ostell, Architect, Surveyor* (Montreal: McCord Museum, 1985), p. 13.

¹² Pamela Miller et al., *The McCord Family: A passionate vision* (Montreal: McCord Museum, 1992), p. 59.

¹³ According to Ellen James, the earliest image of the Protestant Orphan Asylum on St. Catherine St. between Peel and Stanley was a pencil sketch by Eliza Ross, the treasurer and John Samuel's sister-in-law. The architect who built the Asylum was John Ostell. See *John Ostell, Architect, Surveyor* (Montreal: 1985), p. 55. A design of the entrance to the Asylum was also made in John Samuel's hand and is found in NAC, Summerhill Home, MG 28, I 388, Vol. 15, file 5, Mg28, I 388, Vol. 14, file 5, Report of the Gentlemen's' Committee appointed to aid the Ladies in the construction of their new asylum on St. Catherine Street, 1851. Reel 1716.

have built a Temple – and so shall I’ – He was too well informed to place two stories under a Greek pediment and so he constructed the Doric III [sided] hypaethial structure...¹⁴

Was it John Samuel’s education in the classics, which inspired such deference to ancient forms, as his son, suggests? Or was it a sign of his patrician aspirations?

Vitruvius is credited with creating a system of proportion which derived its dimensions from the human form. Ancient Greek civic architecture was based on his calculations. In temple architecture for which it was devised, the size and placement of the various elements in the design, the columns, frieze and peristyle, were all set in relation to one other: “...the upper parts of the building made precise demands on the lower, and each element was not only proportionally generated but also proportionally keyed to all other elements of the design.”¹⁵ In other words, to be true to Vitruvius’s classical values, it was not done to place two stories under a Greek pediment. In making the remark, David McCord seems more concerned with defending his father’s reputation as a scholar than with explaining why he chose the particular spot on the Mountain that he did.¹⁶ Nonetheless, David McCord’s point does suggest that John Samuel’s decision to purchase Temple Grove was an aesthetic one. The dates 1837-38, the years when Temple Grove was being built, however, offer another possible interpretation.

In her research on nineteenth-century villas in Quebec, France Gagnon-Pratte found only two examples of the Greek Revival style in Lower-Canadian domestic architecture: Temple Grove and the Caldwell Manor, Bois-de-Coulonges, which later became Governor General Lord Elgin’s residence in Quebec City.¹⁷ As Harold Kalman mentions in his *A History of Canadian Architecture*, the Greek temple was not a structure easily adapted to the Canadian

¹⁴ MCFP, File #2065, August 15, 1916. Punctuation and emphasis in the original.

¹⁵ Spiro Kostof, *A History of Architecture, 2nd ed. Settings and Rituals* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 124.

¹⁶ At some point DRM began annotating his father’s notebooks. The first instance was JSM’s school journal from 1816. DRM writes: “I have a purse he won at this School. The sound classical training is important. The two Stuarts of Quebec, Andrew and James, my father, Buchanan, this man Short, all pupils at Dr. Wilkie’s school, Quebec City.” See MCFP, file #402, no date.

¹⁷ France Gagnon-Pratte, *L’architecture et la nature à Québec au dix-neuvième siècle: les villas*, p. 57. Coincidentally, while living at Monkland’s, the Governor General’s residence in Montreal, Lord Elgin and his family were neighbours of the McCords.

climate. Roger Kennedy, former director of the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History, provides another explanation for why examples of Greek Revival architecture were so rare in this country. "The Revival was seen as an American patriotic statement, distasteful to the descendants of Tory emigrants resettled in Ontario and to Spaniards who were citizens of the United States by conquest."¹⁸

John Samuel was a staunch Tory as well as being an amateur meteorologist of some reputation. This later occupation afforded him an extensive knowledge of Montreal's climatic conditions. Why then would Greek Revival with its political and real shortcomings, be so attractive to him? It was said to be cheaper to build in that style than in others and that may well have been a factor. But more likely, the appeal lay in its symbolic value. Buildings are coded for their semiotic functions. By choosing Greek Revival, which was a civic architecture used for government buildings and universities, John Samuel was showing his approval of ancient Greek ideas about citizenship. Like Plato in his *Republic*, John Samuel's conception of democracy did not extend to all individuals. What qualified an individual for citizenship was their gender, social class, and ethnicity. In a diary entry made following the local parliamentary election of 1848 in which the French Canadian leader Lafontaine was re-elected, John Samuel makes the comment: "...spring gradually approaching - when is all this democratic spirit to end - is the world to assume throughout a republican garb! The prospect is very far from encouraging."¹⁹ Like many from his social class, he believed only upper-class men and especially upper-class men from the English-speaking Protestant milieu, were qualified to govern by virtue of their sex, their breeding, and their education.

III

While Temple Grove was under construction, John Samuel was otherwise engaged in putting down *Patriote* attempts at toppling British rule in the colony.

¹⁸ Roger Kennedy, *Greek Revival America* (New York: Stewart Tabor & Chang, 1989), p. 17.

¹⁹ MCFP, file #410, John Samuel McCord's diary, April 29, 1848. Punctuation and emphasis in the original.

A lieutenant colonel of the Royal Montreal Cavalry and the commander of the 1st volunteer brigade, he took on the task of protecting the city from rebel attacks.²⁰ Insurrection had erupted in both Upper and Lower Canada in reaction to a political crisis that had effectively paralyzed the workings of government since the previous spring. Angered by the British Colonial Office's heavy-handed support of the Governor of Lower Canada against the wishes of the elected assembly, the majority of whom were French-speaking members of the *Patriote* Party, parliamentarians took to the streets to protest the tyranny of the British Crown and the policies of their supporters, the local English-speaking mercantile elite. When *Patriote* agitation turned to armed insurrection in the fall of 1837, the combined force of the British Army and the Royal Montreal Cavalry, a group of English-speaking loyalists led by John Samuel McCord, were called upon to put down the rebellion.²¹

For the local colonial administrators and their allies, the English Protestant merchants, 1838 marked a decisive turning point in political and economic fortunes in Lower Canada. If anyone had cause to celebrate the failed *Patriote* attempt to seize power from British colonial authorities in 1837-38, it was this class. With the defeat of the *Patriotes*, the forces of liberalism and republicanism in Lower Canada were temporarily obliterated from the political map. Now the members of the English-speaking elite were finally in a position to impose their own agenda on the colony without interference from their political foes, the *Patriotes*. During the years of the authoritarian Special Council, according to historian Steven Watt, the Montreal-based Constitutional Association, the political arm of Montreal's English-speaking merchants, found a sympathetic ear among British colonial policy makers.²²

In the aftermath of the Rebellion, colonial administrators with the example of the American rebellion forever before them, moved quickly to strengthen the

²⁰ Pamela Miller et al., *The McCord Family: A passionate vision*, p. 67. Also see Brian Young, "The Volunteer Militia in Lower Canada, 1837-50," (Montreal: Montreal History Group, 1998).

²¹ Pamela Miller et al., p. 67. Jean-Paul Bernard, *The Rebellions of 1837-38 in Lower Canada* (Ottawa: CHA Historical Booklet, No. 55, 1996).

²² Steve Watt, "Authoritarianism, Constitutionalism and the Special Council of Lower Canada, 1838-1841," M.A. History, McGill University, 1997.

British presence in the colony. The abolition of French feudal land tenure, improvements to navigation on the St. Lawrence River, the rewriting of the Civil Code to make it more accommodating to British law, and the legislative union of the two Canadas, were all measures that had been proposed by the Constitutionalists.²³

The power and authority of this group, based as it was on wealth generated from large-scale land transactions, employment as government agents, and participation in commercial trade with the mother country, had their interests greatly advanced by the privileged relationship they enjoyed with the British colonial administration. Although John Samuel McCord, secretary of the Constitutional Association, was never appointed to the Special Council, his rich merchant friends Peter McGill, William Badgley, and George Moffatt played key roles in securing the Association's objectives on Council.

The Constitutionalists were a bigoted lot. They supported legislative union with Upper Canada because it promised to reduce French Canadians to a minority within this larger federation. Legislative union was a step on the road to what they hoped would be the complete assimilation of French Canada. British governing classes both at home and abroad saw themselves, to borrow an expression from David Cannadine, "...as the lords of all the world and ... of humankind. They placed themselves at the top of the scale of civilization and achievement, they ranked all other races in descending order beneath them, according to their relative merits (and demerits)..."²⁴ Montreal's colonial elite were no different; they too imagined themselves the superiors of both the French Canadians and that other subject race, Canada's Native peoples.²⁵

Montreal's English-speaking elite were liberals when it came to economics, but otherwise they held views that were unequivocally conservative. Agents of the British class system, they were what constituted the local

²³ Ibid, p. 8.

²⁴ David Cannadine, *Ornamentalism: How the British Saw Their Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2001), p. 5.

²⁵ Steve Watt makes a similar argument in, "Authoritarianism, Constitutionalism and the Special Council of Lower Canada, 1838-1841," M.A. History, McGill University, 1997.

aristocracy, defenders of a social order based on the fine gradations of inequality.²⁶ Cannadine writes, "...Britons generally conceived of themselves as belonging to an unequal society characterized by a seamless web of layered gradations, which were hallowed by time and precedent, which were sanctioned by tradition and religion, and which extended in a great chain of being from the monarch at the top to the humblest subject at the bottom."²⁷ For a brief moment in the middle decades of the nineteenth century, a dominant class would seek to impose its English view of the world, in the face of what its members perceived as the impending disorder caused by the presence of a Catholic, French-speaking majority, in a Protestant, English-speaking colony. They had less difficulty assuming their authority over the Native population. Contempt for the non-white races, whether African or indigenous, was an integral part of British colonial attitudes all along the coast of America, from Newfoundland to Virginia.²⁸ The French Canadians were another matter, however. Their religion and language set them apart, but they still remained Europeans like their English masters. *Les Canadiens* had the irritating habit of not acting like a subject people; they too felt entitled to all the rights and privileges guaranteed by the British Crown, including the right of elected assembly.

Emboldened by their victory over the French Canadian *Patriotes* and by a demographic shift that made English the dominant language in Montreal, the

²⁶ Since the 1970s, this segment of Lower Canadian society has been neglected by historians. See Allan Greer and Ian Radforth, ed., *Colonial Leviathan: State Formation in Mid-Nineteenth-Century Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), Brian Young, *The Making and Unmaking of a University Museum* (Montreal & Kingston: 2000), pp. 16-30 and *The Politics of Codification. The Lower Canadian Civil Code of 1866* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1994). See Gerald Tulchinsky's *The River Barons: Montreal Businessmen and the Growth of Industry and Transportation, 1837-1853* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1977) and George Bervin's *Québec au XIX siècle: L'activité économique des grands marchands* (Sillery, Québec: Septentrion, 1991). Also see Gary Caldwell and Eric Waddell, *The English of Quebec From Majority to Minority Status* (Québec: Institut québécois de recherche sur la culture, 1982), Elsbeth Heaman, "Commercial Leviathan: Central Canadian Exhibitions at Home and Abroad during the Nineteenth Century," Ph.D. thesis History, University of Toronto, 1996, and Ronald Rudin, *The Forgotten Quebecers: A History of English Speaking Quebec, 1759-1980* (Québec: Institut québécois de la recherche sur la culture, 1986), Richard Vaudry, *Anglicans and the Atlantic World: High Churchmen, Evangelicals, and the Quebec Connection* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's Press, 2003).

²⁷ David Cannadine, *Ornamentalism: How the British Saw Their Empire*, p. 4.

²⁸ Cannadine, *Ornamentalism*, p. 13.

defenders of British colonialism in Lower Canada sought to inscribe these new relations of power in the urban landscape.²⁹ Frank Turner writes that Europeans showed a renewed interest in Greek antiquity in the period following the French Revolution when the expression of Enlightenment ideas were upsetting the old order inherited from the Roman and Christian past. Some turned to Greece to justify contemporary changes while others such as John Samuel and his friends, to repudiate the Enlightenment revolution.³⁰ One of the institutions that would play a central role in the 'New Town' was McGill University. Both McGill's first building and the McCord residence would be designed in Greek Revival style to signify their patron's conservatism.

John Samuel and the governors of McGill did not find Greek Revival distasteful to their Tory sensibilities perhaps because, like their American counterparts, it enabled them to denote a new order, and to refashion the city in their own likeness.³¹ Their 'New Town' rising on the southern slopes of Mount Royal would be everything 'Vieux Montréal' was not: clean and uncrowded, its broad boulevards lined with monuments to English entrepreneurship and culture, a celebration of the British colonial tie. In 1838-39, John Ostell was commissioned by the patrons of the Royal Institute for the Advancement of Learning to build on the McGill site on Sherbrooke Street. At the same time as a new building (today's Arts building) was being constructed, Lord Durham was composing his *Report on the Affairs of British North America* in which he expressed his conviction that "the national character of which must be given to Lower Canada must be that of the British Empire."³² Lord Durham's desire was shared by the governors of McGill who, in their meeting of January 20, 1840, discussed the importance of English higher education for the colony: "McGill College ... when completed and in operation will be the only institution in Lower

²⁹ Colin Coates, *The Metamorphoses of Landscape and Community in Early Quebec* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queens, 2000), and Rhys Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia 1740-1790* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982).

³⁰ Frank Turner, *The Greek Heritage in Victorian Britain* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1981), p. 2.

³¹ See Roderick MacLeod, "Salubrious Settings and Fortunate Families: The Making of Montreal's Golden Square Mile, 1840-1895."

³² As quoted in Ellen James's *John Ostell, Architect, Surveyor*, p. 34.

Canada where persons of British origin and descent will be able to procure for their children a university education conformable to British feelings, habits and principles.”³³

John Samuel’s purchase of property on the Côte-des-Neiges Road in 1835 placed him in the vanguard of wealthy English-speaking Montrealers who in the half century that followed would abandon the original French settlement on the banks of the St. Lawrence River for the higher elevations of Mount Royal. As a community, New Town would be characterized by its material wealth, its linguistic and religious homogeneity, and its colonial imitations of British high culture. Colonizing the Mountain was a bold move, but a necessary one for a community bent on Anglicization. Temple Grove may have been planned before the Rebellions of 1837-38, but its location and design were reactions to the perceived need to affirm English dominance at the time.

Geography had provided the McCord residence, situated as it was on the side of Mount-Royal overlooking the St. Lawrence River, with natural barriers against the encroachment of city life. It was an ideal retreat from urban cares and yet it was within walking distance of Montreal. Temple Grove’s natural beauty also made it an impressive backdrop for the drawing room parties and dinners thrown for the benefit of the local gentry. Among McCord guests were high-ranking members of the British military; prominent Anglicans like Bishop Fulford, who had his own key to the gardens, George Moffatt and Peter McGill, two leaders of the Montreal business community; and visiting scholars with whom John Samuel corresponded on meteorological questions.³⁴ What host and guests shared, beyond the oysters and champagne, was a similar place in the local colonial hierarchy. As purveyors of British imperial culture, they were the self-appointed judges of local exhibitions, the founders of the natural history and horticultural societies, lay bishops in the Anglican Church, and the men and women who sat on the boards of the Protestant charities. In their ideal society, patterned after the British class system, it was they who provided the community

³³ James, *John Ostell*, p. 35.

³⁴ For more about Peter McGill see Gerald Tulchinsky, *The River Barons: Montreal businessmen and the growth of industry and transportation 1837-53*, pp. 20-21.

with leadership and exercised control over local institutions, while the landless workers were expected to participate while showing suitable deference to their superiors.

Not everyone shared this vision of colonial life, however. Many had come to North America to escape the tyrannies of the British class system. The Irish Catholics who emigrated to Montreal in large numbers in the nineteenth century had come in the wake of famine but also as rebels at war with England. The huge expanses of land and the abundance of resources held out the promise of a more democratic society based on independence and equality. Although there were some anglophiles to be found among the French-Canadian elite, the majority of the population was not as enthusiastic about embracing British institutions and a foreign culture.³⁵ After a visit to the provincial exhibition where he had acted as a judge, John Samuel wrote in his diary: "A very fine day and a very fine exhibition -- all the world came out, except our French Canadian population who have no taste whatsoever."³⁶ To him, as to his fellow members of agricultural and other philanthropic societies in Lower Canada, the masses could be "treated as minors, not quite capable of recognizing their own best interest."³⁷

Temple Grove was as much a showcase for John Samuel and Anne Ross McCord's talents as it was a place for raising a family. The strict separation of home and work, private and public, that were said to be an important characteristic of Victorian bourgeois society, imperfectly describes the arrangements at Temple Grove.³⁸ Before the election of parliaments by universal suffrage, social gatherings were as important as strictly political ones.³⁹ While Lord Elgin was Governor General, he and his family were frequent guests at Temple Grove; their daughter, Elina Bruce, was a playmate of the older McCord

³⁵ See Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empire, 1875-1914* (London: Abacus, 1987), pp. 76-77.

³⁶ MCFP, file #410, John Samuel McCord's diary, Sept. 15, 1849.

³⁷ Elsbeth Heaman, "Commercial Leviathan: Central Canadian Exhibitions at Home and Abroad during the Nineteenth Century," Ph.D. History, University of Toronto, 1996, p. 44.

³⁸ For a historical survey of the separate spheres interpretation, see Linda Kerber, "Separate Spheres, Female Worlds, Women's Place: the Rhetoric of Women's History," *Journal of American History*, No. 75, 1988, pp. 9-39.

³⁹ Mary Ryan. *Women in Public* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1990), p. 13. Jack Little in his unpublished paper "Gender and Gentility on the Eastern Townships Frontier: Lucy

children. In his description of one visit by the Elgins, John Samuel captures the mix of business and pleasure that characterized life at Temple Grove.

Ann's Sacramental day-at home with the children. ...a visit from the Governor General and Lady Elgin to advise the [planting] from the summer house ...for half an hour they departed; during the conversation...showed them the parts of the country that were visible, Eastern Townships, discussed the feasibility of a railroad for that region.⁴⁰

John Samuel found the Governor General to be "a most kind & amiable man in private life."⁴¹ But he was irritated by Elgin's accommodating attitude towards the French Canadian leaders of reform: "His Lordship's cue under the present administration is to talk French which he did fluently last night but still 'comme un Anglais'."⁴² What John Samuel and others from his Tory circle objected to was the Governor General's role in paving the way for Responsible Government. What they feared was a French Canadian majority in the parliament of Canada East, which they were convinced would work to further marginalize their social and economic interests. Just days before the torching of the Parliament buildings in the spring of 1849 at the hands of a Tory mob, John Samuel reacted to a recent article on the 'British American League', headed by his dear friend George Moffatt, and its support for closer ties with Britain by noting that Canada would never "equal the neighbouring states under the Roman ascendancy."⁴³

In a city whose civic architecture and public infrastructure were still in their infancy, social events organized by the colony's ruling class provided unique opportunities for displays of authority. In a diary entry dated June 22, 1847, John Samuel gives his impressions of the first official function given by the new Governor General and his wife, Lady Elgin:

Lady Elgin held her first drawing room this evening at Monklands 9pm the Lady looked well and her countenance is very placid and pleasing though not perhaps _____ handsome. All the notables of the Capital were there and some who were not so. The house is totally unfit for such a crowd, ...the company were detained several hours getting them put

Peel's Journal, 1833-36," argues that genteel social rituals undertaken by the local gentry were also a reaction to the leveling threats of the frontier environment.

⁴⁰ MCFP, file #410, John Samuel McCord's diary, June 11, 1848.

⁴¹ MCFP, file #410, John Samuel McCord's diary, January 6, 1848.

⁴² MCFP, file #410, John Samuel McCord's diary, May 17, 1848.

⁴³ MCFP, file #410, John Samuel McCord's diary, April 21, 1849.

behind during which it rained and thundered ad libertuem. The vice-regal party in the interior were shut up in a withdrawing room on the right of the Hall, and cut off from the domestic features of the establishment. I have no doubt the Ladyship who is said she is finding ____ new interesting situation, would have been displeased with ____ a retreat in good order to the level of a governor's residence. As to the honorable members of both houses [who had] ... felt all their inconveniences it is likely that a sufficient palace will be built for the future Governors of Canada. The Governor General wore the uniform of Colonial Governor, there what it is impossible, in my opinion, to be any less becoming.⁴⁴

Like Monklands, Temple Grove was a residence without a ballroom. Dinner parties of fifteen or more were accommodated around the large mahogany dining room table commissioned from a local cabinetmaker when the house was first built. Originally designed to seat the officers from John Samuel's regiment, the table had many leaves that made it capable of accommodating upwards of thirty guests. A white and blue Davenport dinner set with lacquered transfers was purchased for thirty-six at about the same time.⁴⁵ In a letter to his eldest son John Davidson, John Samuel makes light of the drawbacks associated with throwing a large party at Temple Grove: "Think of that dear John! a ball at Temple Grove - and moreover there were 80 guests, who amused themselves apparently so well that they didn't leave until 2 in Saturday morning. Now you will ask where did we put them! This must remain a secret till you come home and you may in the mean time think of any equally difficult problem such as a 'reel in a bottle'."⁴⁶ Balls may have been a rare occurrence at Temple Grove but dinner parties involving friends and Anne Ross' family took place frequently.

The country villa was a symbol of conspicuous consumption but that didn't mean the house had to be uncomfortable. One of the main functions of Temple Grove was to provide a suitable environment for family members to pursue their favourite leisure activities. Pleasant diversions abounded. There was a piano for the musically inclined and a well-stocked library. Anne Ross had an

⁴⁴ MCFP, file #410, John Samuel McCord's diary, June 22, 1847. Punctuation and emphasis in the original.

⁴⁵ "Personal communications with Conrad Graham, McCord Museum of Canadian History, March 11, 2003."

⁴⁶ MCFP, file #1108, General Correspondence, John Samuel McCord to John Davidson McCord, Feb. 4, 1855.

easel set up in one of the rooms where she painted portraits of her family and of the many flowers that were cultivated on the property. The big attraction at Temple Grove was the garden. When John Samuel was not in the Eastern Townships presiding over court, he spent much of his time practicing his twin passions of gardening and meteorology. A student of natural science, John Samuel used his garden as a place of experimentation, bringing together old world plants with new world conditions. In 1898, local writer Richard Starke published a piece on Temple Grove, which appeared in *The Canadian Horticultural Magazine*. Most of the article, according to David McCord, was written from notes that he himself supplied. In the article Starke describes John Samuel's method for gathering plants:

...the closing of the Court was often followed by an expedition into the woods or swamps, and the privileges of the Judge of the District frequently exercised in stopping the progress of the coach, then the method of conveyance, to procure a desired specimen seen by the roadside. The result was that the *American border* at Temple Grove was an easy medium for the travelling(sic) scientist or educated English woman to survey at a glance the denizens of the not easily penetrated haunts of nature.⁴⁷

The garden was extensive, covering most of the eight *arpents* lot, beginning at Côte-des-Neiges Road and continuing up the Mountain. Designed by its owner after the picturesque style first introduced to England in the eighteenth century, the garden ultimately included a folly (naturally occurring); a winding path with foot bridges; the Victoria seat where visitors were encouraged to pause and admire the view; a croquet field; and a summer house donated by David Ross as a gift to his daughter.⁴⁸ Starke's article provides the following description of the garden as remembered by David McCord some forty years later:

The long shrubberies and more conventional *parterres* perfumed the air, or displayed in scores of beds what our climate permitted to be grown of the perennials and annuals. A rustic bridge, covered with vines, spanned a ravine and terminated in an arbour, one of the many that suggested a book or thought. Honeysuckles, or Espalier Roses, ten feet in height adorned the

⁴⁷ NAC, Richard Starke, "Note on Old and Modern Gardens of Montreal," *The Canadian Horticultural Magazine*, Vol. I, No. 12, March 1898, p. 335. Punctuation and emphasis in the original.

⁴⁸ See John Dixon Hunt, *Gardens and the Picturesque* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1992), and Stephanie Ross, *What Gardens Mean* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

walks. The place was a succession of gracefully broken surfaces, and the paths followed them. The theory of the garden was to be directed by nature rather than direct her, and the success of the result proved the correctness of the theory. There was hardly a straight walk, and there were acres of them.⁴⁹

David McCord and his youngest sister Annie were both avid gardeners and members of the Montreal Horticultural Society. In the mid-eighties, David McCord was one of the driving forces behind a project to establish a botanical garden on Mount Royal, adjacent to McGill University.⁵⁰

Less is known about the interior of the house. Photographs taken in the early 1920s show the main entrance with the open stairway leading to the second floor, and the first floor withdrawing room, which by this time had become part of the McCord National museum. These two features, the open stair and the withdrawing room, are what distinguished Temple Grove from its more humble cousin the colonial saltbox. The open stairway was a sign of opulence and power. Most two-story houses had closed stairways that ran around the chimney stack. They were cheaper to build and more practical in the Canadian climate. Open stairways channeled the warm air to the second stories, but one drawback was that they offered less secure footing. Formal entertaining was the guiding principle of these houses and to this end an imposing entrance way and a spacious hall leading to the main staircase was standard. The hall at Temple Grove joined the open staircase to the second floor, the dining and the withdrawing room.

The great stair was an invention of the Renaissance. It marked the route of the lord of manor from the hall, where more boisterous entertainments took place, to his chamber on the second floor, which was considered a more refined space reserved for conversation.⁵¹ The broad staircase served as a parade route for guests in the eighteenth century when ballrooms were often built on the second floor. By the nineteenth century, the upper story was usually reserved exclusively for family use, but the wide staircase with its turned balustrade and newel posts

⁴⁹ NAC, Richard Starke, "Note on Old and Modern Gardens of Montreal," p. 338.

⁵⁰ Montreal Horticultural Society, "Eleventh Annual Report of the Montreal Horticultural Society" (Montreal: the Gazette, 1886), pp. 1-170.

⁵¹ Richard Bushman, *The Refinement of America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992), p. 119.

remained important as an indicator that the rooms above were as refined as the rooms below.

The formal parlour or withdrawing room was the most important room in the house and was usually the largest. It is safe to assume that the same was true at Temple Grove. The withdrawing room was the space enclosed by the three-sided portico. In the photographs taken in the 1920s, the interior decoration, plaster moldings and the like were minimal. On the plain whitewashed walls were hung paintings by local artists. In *The McCord Family: A Passionate Vision*, Pam Miller and Brian Young described the walls as being covered with “drawings and watercolour views of Montreal by James Duncan, commissioned by John Samuel McCord over a period of twenty years..., together with watercolour paintings by one of Duncan’s main students, Anne Ross McCord, and Dulongpré’s pastels of the seasons *Autumn* and *Winter*.”⁵² Furnishings came from the parents of both John Samuel and Anne Ross. A green Windsor chair used by John Samuel in his office formed part of the inventory of the Davidson home in 1808.⁵³

When the house was first built, it was insured for £350, much less than the total cost of construction which came to £860.⁵⁴ When the house became the McCords’ principal residence, its insurable value had jumped to £1700.⁵⁵ In the intervening years a gardener’s cottage, a coach house, and stables were added. It may have been during this period that the original structure was enlarged to make it more comfortable for year-round living, but the lack of any clear plans makes this difficult to confirm.⁵⁶

IV

With the death of John Samuel McCord in 1865, Temple Grove was put up for sale by his widow. When a buyer was not forthcoming, Anne Ross with the

⁵² Miller, et al., *McCord Family: A passionate vision*, p. 73.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ MCPF, file #435, Temple Grove was completed in the spring of 1838 when the gate was added and the fence installed. The land cost £500 and the building £860 for a total cost of £1360.

⁵⁵ MCPF, file #436, Mutual Fire Insurance Co. of the County of Montreal.

⁵⁶ In the archival collection at the McCord Museum there is an architectural drawing identified as Temple Grove. On closer scrutiny by architectural historian Susan Bronson and myself, we both

support of her son David decided to place a mortgage on Temple Grove instead.⁵⁷ In 1870, Anne Ross died leaving the house, its contents, and the grounds, to be split four ways among her surviving children. In practice, only David McCord and his two sisters Jane and Annie lived on at Temple Grove. Robert Arthur McCord, the youngest son, had left home on the day of his father's funeral to take up a commission in the British Army. At the time of his mother's death, Robert Arthur was preparing to leave for India. As executor of his parents' will, and with power of attorney over his brother's affairs, David McCord was effectively left with the power to control the fate of Temple Grove.

One of David McCord's first acts as master of Temple Grove was to commission a series of scenic views from the Montreal photographer Alexander Henderson.⁵⁸ Compiled sometime around 1871, the McCord Red album (so named for its red leather covers) was made up of forty-eight albumen prints, most of which were stock photographs of rural landscapes from the area around Montreal. It is the first nine photographs however, taken of three McCord houses, which reveal the provenance of this album. As Martha Langford points out in her book-length study of photographic albums, Henderson photographed four McCord houses, not just the three included in the album: two houses that had belonged to David Ross McCord's grandfather Thomas McCord, located on the Nazareth Fief, Temple Grove built by John Samuel, as well as the house built by his namesake, David Ross, his maternal grandfather, on the Champ de Mars.⁵⁹ David McCord's decision to exclude the photo of his maternal grandfather's house from the collection makes the album into a straightforward genealogical statement. Another omission, although less conspicuous because it was never commissioned in the first place, was an image of his great-grandfather's house still standing in Quebec City. John McCord's stone tavern, it would appear, did

concluded that the drawing's outlines do not correspond with the distinctive shape found in photographs of the building's exterior.

⁵⁷ Don Fyson, "Rich Man, Poor Man, Beggar Man... Thief? Four Generations of McCord Family Wealth, 1760-1920, unpublished paper, Montreal, 1992, p. 32.

⁵⁸ Alexander Henderson was the photographer of the Montreal Orphan Asylum. He also shared with David McCord, an avid interest in local history.

⁵⁹ Martha Langford, *Suspended Conversations* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001), p. 55.

not lend itself to the kind of architectural genealogy David was now trying to construct for himself.

There are other signs of David McCord's dynastic aspirations as they centred on Temple Grove. In all of the Henderson photographs taken of the house and gardens, with the exception of those of the summer house, (**Figure 2, p. 181**) David McCord stands somewhere in the background affirming his possession with his presence. In the photograph of the house itself, he leans nonchalantly against a pillar, dressed in top hat and frock coat, looking every inch the gentleman surveying his domain (**see Figures 3-6, p. 179-181**). Absent from the images are Annie and Jane McCord who together were half owners of the property as well as its residents. David McCord did not take over Temple Grove until his marriage in 1878, when he asked his two sisters to leave, but already in 1871, Temple Grove's destiny was foreshadowed.

In the next generation, under David McCord's influence, Temple Grove gradually and irreversibly descended into the realm of the fanciful. The change could be measured by a number of alterations to the garden, which were minor, but together they amounted to a powerful statement about the new direction of Temple Grove. Sometime in the 1880s, after his marriage to Letitia Chambers, David McCord undertook to create a facsimile of the battlefield of the Plains of Abraham in his front yard. In this early version of heritage park conservation, the main walkway and entrance steps to Temple Grove were altered to recreate the dimensions of the famous battlefield at Quebec.⁶⁰

'The distance between this terrace and the road is the famous forty yards on the Plains of Abraham-the forty yards which as effectively transferred a continent to Britain as did the treaty of the succeeding year at Montreal. The height of this terrace above the lawn is the advantage of the position which the French had over Wolfe's army on the Plains. The steps there in the path to the house are twelve in number. They represent the twelve regiments in Wolfe's army. Look at them.... The first is the 15th regiment, the next is the 28th, then the 35th, the 43rd, the 47th, the 48th, the 58th, the Monkton, the 60th, the 78th, the Highlanders, and the Louisburg Grenadiers, (I give the regiments from memory, and may be wrong in

⁶⁰ On the origins of the outdoor history museum see, Edward Alexander, *Museums in Motion* (Nashville: American Association of State and Local History, 1979), p. 84.

some details)'.⁶¹

In this excavation of rock and earth could be discerned the contours of McCord's symbolic universe. Signs of death and commemoration proliferated in surroundings whose vocation was increasingly shaped by the needs of the dead rather than those of the living. In an interview with a British journalist in 1910, McCord stated bluntly, "I am in collaboration with the dead."⁶² This was even more apparent in the interior, where rooms that had been designed to accommodate the needs of a growing family, now served as 'home' to thousands of historical 'relics' that McCord referred to as 'my children'.⁶³

In rooms that displayed enough clutter to qualify as high Victorian, the personal effects of four generations of McCords mixed with other historical markers from Canada's past. Human relics conserved under glass bell-jars competed with Worcester tea sets, furnishings, Native objects of all descriptions, and a panoply of military hardware, in a promiscuous mingling of personal object with historical artifact that defied modern museum arrangement.⁶⁴ (Figures 8, p. 182) Rooms that had once formed the backdrop for family celebrations and gatherings of Montreal's elite were reinscribed with meanings derived exclusively from the past and renamed in consequence of their new functions. The main floor was divided into library, picture gallery, Canada Room and West Room. Withdrawing room became Canada Room where his mother's art was on display, the hallway, the official picture gallery home to General Brock's sword and thirty-nine oil paintings depicting the history of Canada, the dining room now the West Room contained the James Wolfe collection including an eight-foot panoramic view of the Battle of the Plains of Abraham. In the library, next to his

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² David Ross McCord, as quoted in *The Daily Telegraph*, October 20, 1910. He repeats this phrase, 'the collaboration of the dead', in MCFP, file #2065, Notes & Suggestions, "(Paul Borget of the French Academy – 1911) Happy expression of what my occupation has been and is here. (A humble disciple of St. Helena)." Punctuation is DRM's.

⁶³ Laurier Papers, NAC, Vol. 287, MG26G, Reel C805, DRM to Laurier, Oct. 21, 1903.

⁶⁴ Newspaper photographs and articles describing the collection from this period attest to McCord's own style of arrangement. For descriptions of the interior of Temple Grove see: Edgar Collard. "The collector: David McCord," *100 More Tales from All Our Yesterdays* (Montreal: The Gazette, 1990); *Westmount News*, May 2, 1908, "Temple Grove: A Revelation;" C. Lintern Sibley, "An Archipelago of Memories," *MacLean's Magazine*, March 1914.

books, was kept 'Tecumseh's War Bonnet'.⁶⁵ Manifest in the rooms were signs of the shifting definitions of public and private that underpinned McCord's own idea of home and work. This blurring of distinctions between private and public was the outcome of McCord's passionate desire to turn the fruits of his collecting, an obsessional practice pursued in private, into a national monument supported by public monies. What at first glance appeared as so much collected chaos revealed upon repeated viewings an order and system of classification, which expressed through its many idiosyncrasies the worldview of its owner, David Ross McCord.⁶⁶

The display at Temple Grove harkened back to the Renaissance 'cabinet of curiosities': the private museums assembled by wealthy European merchants and scholars of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, whose guiding principle was the reproduction of a symbolic representation of all creation.⁶⁷ In specially constructed display cabinets, private rooms, and in some instances gardens, collectors of varying interests and means brought together an assortment of 'curiosities' from the natural and manmade world with the sole objective of "producing a 'cabinet', a model of 'universal nature made private'".⁶⁸ In these 'theatrum mundi', objects were selected by the owner and placed in relation to other objects to create a picture of the world, which was dependent on 'man' the collector/creator for its conception. In this act of creating a perspective of the world, 'man' was both placing himself at the centre of this worldview and

⁶⁵ *Westmount News*, May 2, 1908, "Temple Grove: A Revelation."

⁶⁶ Very little is known about McCord's earliest collection. His organizational methods, however, were borrowed from natural history. His first collection was of ferns. During the years he was seeking a permanent home for his collection he made an inventory of the objects from which the first accession books for the McCord National Museum were derived. It was a condition imposed by the associations (including McGill University), which he approached for support for his museum. The 'guided tour', found in the next chapter, is based on comments made by McCord on objects of which he was making an inventory.

⁶⁷ An actual curiosity cabinet existed at Temple Grove which originally belonged to Anne Ross McCord. Arthur MacGregor, "The Cabinet of Curiosities in seventeenth-century Britain, *The Origins of Museums* (London: Clarendon Press, 1985), Oliver Impey and Arthur MacGregor, ed., pp. 147-58.

⁶⁸ Art historians including Bazin and Alexander have judged the 'cabinets of curiosities' of wealthy European merchants and scholars of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth-centuries as being hopelessly incoherent. See Bazin, *The Museum Age* and E.P. Alexander, *Museums in Motion*. Also see Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge*, (London:

simultaneously constituting himself as its subject. This marked an important departure from the medieval mindset, which held God as the highest authority whose creation of the order of things subsumed 'man's' place within it:

Being in medieval times meant belonging to a definite level in the order of created things, and thus made to correspond to the cause of creation. But the world was not objectified and brought as a representation before the gaze as something which was susceptible to knowledge and control. In modern times, the character of the world is sought and found in representations, and these representations present the world as something that can properly be known, manipulated, assessed, and improved.⁶⁹

The cognitive method employed for physically organizing these 'cabinets' likely followed a practice borrowed from the Ancients called the art of memory.⁷⁰ This art, Eileen Hooper-Greenhill explains, "was a mnemotechnic skill used to train and extend the memory. As such it acted as a tool for knowing."⁷¹

In the age before printing, classical orators relied on their imaginations by drawing upon the mnemonics of place and image, which they then transformed into a system for extending memory. In the Middle Ages, the art of memory had a broader appeal; it was a pictorial art employed not only by medieval monks to remember devotional texts, but by the Christian Church which relied on symbols to remind its unlettered followers of the sacred narrative.⁷² During the late Renaissance, the art of memory retained from the older forms the practice of arranging rare and unusual images in a personal order, but replaced the imaginary and abstract reminders used by ancient and medieval practitioners with material objects taken from the physical world. A concrete memory theatre was born which "in a single glance... could reveal the secret of the universe which could

Routledge, 1992), for a discussion of approaches to understanding the significance of Renaissance 'curiosity cabinets'.

⁶⁹ Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge*, p. 82. Hooper-Greenhill here is paraphrasing M. Heidegger from his article "The Age of the World View," in *Measure*, 2, 1951, p. 10.

⁷⁰ Natural historians of which McCord was one, subscribed to the ancient view that images were more readily recovered by memory and "that intellectual things are best remembered through sensible things," Frances Yates, *The Art of Memory* (London: Pimlico, 1966), p.358. The entire section on memory is inspired by the work of Frances Yates.

⁷¹ *Ibid*, p. 85.

⁷² Raphael Samuel, *Theatres of Memory* (London: Verso, 1994), p. viii.

then be apprehended, understood, synthesized, and memorized.”⁷³ The most famous Renaissance memory theatres were designed by Giulio Camilio. His plan used a semi-circular design, with steps which rose to seven levels, attached to seven gangways giving access to seven doors, representing the cosmic order of the seven planets. The message conveyed by the design of these theatres was sufficiently complex to necessitate the intervention of the architect who was called upon to explain or demonstrate the knowledge his creation represented.⁷⁴ Seen as a powerful philosopher, the designer drew his new authority from the art of memory itself, a practice which empowered the individual to construct his/her own memory images according to a unique vision.⁷⁵

At Temple Grove, it wasn't the order and arrangement of objects per se, that defined the estate as McCord's theatre of memory, but the meaning McCord attached to his surroundings and to its contents. In *The Meaning of Things*, the authors write: “One of the most important psychological purposes of the home is that those objects that have shaped one's personality and which are needed to express concretely those aspects of the self that one values are kept within it. Thus the home is not only a material shelter but also a shelter for those things that make life meaningful.”⁷⁶ What made life meaningful for McCord were the people, places, and things to which he attached meaning. If we know ourselves through the use of language, then we also come to know ourselves by recourse to the symbolic language of the object. In his choice of household objects, and his attitude towards them, McCord created a symbolic universe that both defined and reflected back to him his vision of himself. In most cultures, the objects individuals choose reflect the “potential energy of the person and their power to affect others.”⁷⁷ In McCord's symbolic universe, objects of war took pride of place. One example was the suit of armor that greeted visitors at the entrance to Temple Grove. (See Figure 7, p. 182)

⁷³ Hooper-Greenhill, p. 90.

⁷⁴ Frances Yates, *The Art of Memory* (London: Pimlico, 1984).

⁷⁵ Hooper-Greenhill, p. 95.

⁷⁶ Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Eugene Rochberg-Halton, *The Meaning of Things* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 139.

⁷⁷ Ibid, p. 26.

David McCord's 'theatre of memory' was concerned with recreating a heroic genealogy of masculine origins. Formed by the romantic movement's preoccupation with the individual imagination and with physical loss, McCord's view was contingent on an arrangement of public and private memories and of memory places which, when drawn together in an imaginative act of union, formed "a permanent and complete system against the destructiveness of time."⁷⁸ Raphael Samuel has described the romantic 'theatre of memory' as being more introspective than cosmic, "not scaling the heights but following the inner light."⁷⁹ McCord's gaze was indeed directed inward, taking as his objects of contemplation the actions of his ancestors and their contemporaries, men whose real or imagined heroics on the battlefield or in the courtroom elevated them above the mundane order of things to the lofty position of national myth-makers. Temple Grove was David McCord's cosmos and from the vantage point of its columns and garden paths David McCord extrapolated how the rest of the world should be.

In McCord's mnemonic system, objects occupied a privileged place. They carried out the dual function of both authenticating and memorializing the events which McCord chose to represent in his version of the Canadian past. In an article he wrote for *MacLean's Magazine*, entitled 'An Archipelago of Memories', C. Lintern Sibley included a two-page list of objects which he considered the highlights of the McCord collection. Most of them commemorated military campaigns and their leaders: the war-bonnet allegedly worn by Tecumseh; Native war hero Joseph Brant's skull; and the largest collection of Wolfeiana in the world, a claim McCord made with much pride.⁸⁰ A smaller number of relics celebrated the role of the clergy, both Catholic and Protestant, in their work of spreading Christianity in the 'New World': a piece of the ash tree under which Marie de l'Incarnation, founder of Ursuline Order in Canada, attempted to "soften these heroic sons of the forest;" a belt containing the treaty between the Huron

⁷⁸ Elsner, John and Roger Cardinal, ed., "Introduction," in *The Cultures of Collecting* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1994), p. 1.

⁷⁹ Samuel, *Theatres of Memory*, p. ix.

⁸⁰ C. Lintern Sibley, "An Archipelago of Memories," *MacLean's Magazine*, March 1914.

Indians and the Jesuits for the erection of the first permanent church in Huronia; and a letter written by Charles Inglis, rector of Trinity Church, New York, to Sir William Johnson, sending Dr. Stuart to be a missionary to the Mohawks.⁸¹

At the heart of the collection, however, was an important paradox, for the act of collecting demands that objects be freed from their original context in order to be reconstituted as part of a new context, to be reinscribed into a new narrative of the collector's own creation: "While the point of the souvenir may be remembering, or at least the invention of memory, the point of the collection is forgetting -- starting again in such a way that a finite number of elements create, by virtue of their combination, an infinite reverie."⁸² In this system of forgetting and re-membering, which constitutes one of the main functions of the modern museum, McCord was positioned at the centre of a web of power relations which established him as the unquestionable authority. Much like the architect/philosopher of the Renaissance '*theatrum mundi*', McCord's role as museum builder/historian imbued him with the power of interpretation consigned to artists of memory whose own power depended on their unmatched ability to interpret their own visions. As master of the narrative, McCord believed, he alone was able to impose order on the disparate meanings generated by his collection. It was a role he cherished, but also felt burdened by, as ill health threatened his monopoly over the collection and intensified his anxiety about picking a successor.

In the interior spaces of Temple Grove, McCord took possession of the remnants of history-making events and subjected them to the routine and ritual of domestic life, and in so doing, symbolically reconfigured history to fit the measure of private space and time. In McCord's virtuoso collecting performance objects substituted for people and past events. In Susan Stewart's words, "The souvenir reduces the public, the monumental, and the three-dimensional into the miniature, that which can be enveloped by the body, or into the two-dimensional representation, that which can be appropriated within the privatized view of the

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Minature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984), p. 152.

individual subject.”⁸³ Within the private world of the McCord family residence, David McCord nourished his own subjective view of the past with the things he imbued with his own historical meanings.

When the stone and mortar of Temple Grove proved inadequate to the task, he had them altered, as was the case when the front terrace to Temple Grove was re-landscaped to resemble the battlefield of the Plains of Abraham. Historical event and place were flattened and shrunk to fit the contours of private time and space. But Temple Grove was more than an exotic backdrop for the acting out of historical dramas or a warehouse for Canadiana. His home also acted as a signifier, imbuing each event, place or person with new meanings. In McCord’s theatre of memory were assembled the objects, rooms, gardens, sights, sounds and smells of Temple Grove, the set and props which he needed to construct his historical narrative.

The re-creation of the battlefield of the Plains of Abraham in his front yard was the dramatic gesture of a man who invested heavily in his role as vicarious witness to history-making events. Unlike previous generations of McCord men, including his father whose presence at the Rebellions of 1837-38 as commander of the Montreal militia gave him an important role in shaping Montreal and Quebec’s future for decades to come, the younger McCord derived his influence from reviewing the upheavals of history from a reflective distance. As passive witness rather than as principal actor, McCord rested his subjectivity on his ability to control the historical process through interpretation rather than by direct participation. In becoming a collector, McCord created, in Stephen Bann’s words, “the material conditions for the communication of [his] interpretation: a fragile, perishable legacy that is at the same time a mass of indices bearing witness to the concrete circumstances of his everyday life.”⁸⁴ McCord’s life work embodied an important paradox. His influence lay in the power to interpret, but by working from the margins of the historical process, rather than from its event-making centre, he was dependent on those at the centre of public life, the businessmen,

⁸³ Stewart, *On Longing*, pp. 137-38.

⁸⁴ Stephen Bann, *Under The Sign. John Bargrave as Collector, Traveler, and Witness* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 1994), pp. 20-21.

politicians, and academics, to bring his historical vision to the public. Given the times he was living in, his interpretative authority proved to be an unstable source of power.

As David McCord got older, his preference for the margins was literally reflected in his letter writing. During the years of his campaign to attract support for the McCord museum, he carried out a voluminous correspondence with would-be supporters, other collectors, and people with objects to donate. What is most immediately striking about these letters are the drawings and annotations he squeezed into the margins and between the lines. McCord frequently marked the letters he received by liberally sprinkling his reactions in the original text. The process created visually arresting documents that combine both original text with McCord's own cryptic response. This was the approach David McCord adopted towards his father's diaries. With pencil in hand, he left comments where he felt the need to elaborate on something of historical significance or to correct what he judged to be an error in fact. In his own letter writing, which often involved several drafts, McCord would make additions to his text in the margins, label them with letters, and then place the same letter in the text where he felt it fit. At the end of the 1880s, McCord began to keep what he referred to as his historical notebooks, a series of four hardboard books beginning with the blank pages of a scientific journal of his father's, which he filled with fragments of poems, the romantic poets being his favorite, bits of popular wisdom which included entries from his beloved *Montreal Gazette*, reprints appearing in the local press from the *London Times* and other British newspapers; whole paragraphs from the *Bulletin des recherches historiques* published by Pierre-Georges Roy; and jottings from interviews with historical informants. What unified this eclectic and highly personal collection of recycled thoughts and descriptions painstakingly recopied in longhand, was a fascination with Canadian colonial history as it was experienced by Lower Canada's ruling elite:

...the Beaver Club used to meet in a house kept by a Mrs. Babberty. She was the mother of the wife of Mr. Monk whose cousin was Maria Monk. This Mrs. Monk died at Sorel about 1847. This house was in St. Jean Baptiste St. The medal he said contained \$12 worth of gold and was in that medal given to each member of the club - they wore them as a

‘charm’. He had his father’s one but it was destroyed by fire.⁸⁵

It was history that relied heavily on anecdote. Many of the stories had originated with his parents which McCord would then try to document.⁸⁶

To McCord’s *‘theatrum mundi’* were summoned a select group of guests to look, admire, and in the interests of further collecting, advertise what McCord had taken such pains to assemble. Few visitors would have derived the same covetous pleasure as their host did from these odd bits and pieces of historical memorabilia which so thoroughly dominated McCord’s physical surroundings and his time. What the objects may have lacked in visual appeal, McCord more than made up for with his dramatic and highly whimsical retelling of the Canadian story. One such performance was captured for posterity by the journalist C. Lintern Sibley. His pen allows us a glimpse of David McCord in his storyteller persona describing the final moments of the now famous battle. Costumed in the silk robe of a Japanese nobleman, he stands pointing to the steps of Temple Grove named for Wolfe’s regiments:

Now listen, can’t you hear the conquering volley of that gallant British Army ringing down through the centuries? Can’t you see the gallant British Army rushing the position of the equally gallant French? The battle, short and sharp, is over. Quebec has capitulated. The fate of the continent is decided - and you and I are here!⁸⁷

In this performative moment, McCord was no longer the aging ‘Golden Square Mile’ eccentric, but the director of the most important mise-en-scene in the Canadian historical canon: the ‘titanic’ struggle for possession of the North American continent, waged by the forces of the French and English Empires, on a small battlefield at Quebec. David McCord’s talent for exploiting the dramatic

⁸⁵ MCFP, Historical notebooks, Vol. I, file #709, Feb. 5, 1889, p. 143. Punctuation and emphasis in the original. The medal refers to the medal awarded to members of the Beaver Club who had wintered on the land while engaged in the fur trade. For more on the Beaver Club see Kathleen Jenkins, *Montreal: Island City of the St. Lawrence* (New York: Doubleday, 1966), pp. 219-221.

⁸⁶ Examples of stories told to McCord about Montreal’s past by his parents, his mother especially, are found in his ‘Historical Notebooks’. Native historian Richard White attempts something similar on a much larger scale in *Remembering Ahanagan. Storytelling in a Family’s Past*. (New York: Hill & Wang, 1998).

⁸⁷ C. Lintern Sibley, “An Archipelago of Memories,” *Maclean’s Magazine*, No. 27, March 1914. Sibley also wrote on gardens for *Canadian Magazine*, “The Gospel of Flowers,” April 1912, No. 556.

moment found an outlet in his professional life as a lawyer and in his capacity as representative of the Anglican diocese and secretary of the Liberal Conservative Association. In a letter George Foster sent to David McCord following a banquet they both attended, Foster praised McCord's talents as a public speaker. "You were theatrical in your mode of telling of the telegram, and of its disposition, and the girl who is creating a furor at 'His Majesty's' could take lessons."⁸⁸

When museum building became McCord's *raison d'être*, guiding visitors through the cluttered rooms of Temple Grove not only gave him the opportunity to show off his dramatic skills as a story-teller, but also became one of the principal ways McCord had of attracting support for his museum. Spectators were drawn from three communities. There were the academics (or the academically minded): local historian and urban reformer Dr. W.D. Atherton,⁸⁹ whose respect for McCord's knowledge of Montreal history was sufficient for him to request McCord's presence on the editorial committee for his book on the history of Montreal; Mary Agnes Fitzgibbon from the Canadian Historical Exhibition, who in her thank-you note to McCord expressed an enthusiasm for the experience that was palpable; and the equally acquisitive Arthur Doughty, head of the Dominion archives, whose genuine pleasure in what the museum had to offer came closest to matching that of its owner.⁹⁰ Invitations were also extended to newspapermen: Lord Northcliffe of the *Daily Mail*; Lord Beaverbrook of the *Daily Express* and

⁸⁸ MCFP, file #1809 George Foster, K.C. to DRM, May 23, 1908. 'His Majesty's' refers to a theatre on Guy St. in Montreal that no longer exists. George Foster, K.C. was a Conservative cabinet minister in the Macdonald and Borden governments where he was responsible for Finance, Trade, and Commerce respectively. See W. S. Wallace, *The Memoirs of the Rt. Hon. Sir George Foster* (Toronto, McClelland & Stewart 1933).

⁸⁹ William Henry Atherton (1867-1950) was born in England. In 1907 he emigrated to Canada where he pursued his career as a teacher, first in Alberta, and then in Montreal at Loyola College. Always interested in civic affairs, in 1911 he organized a campaign to clean up the city. At Université Laval (Montreal) he taught both English literature and Canadian history. Atherton was the first person in Canada to use radio to give courses on literature, history, and social reform. See Université de Montréal archives, fonds de recherche, "William Henry Atherton."

⁹⁰ See Samuel Grove's description of Arthur Doughty's visit to Temple Grove in *The Westmount News*, 'Waken Up, Westmount', February 27, 1909, p. 1. Arthur Doughty (1860-1936) was born in England and came to Canada in 1886. In 1897 he joined the Quebec public service. He was joint Legislative Librarian of Quebec when, in 1904, he was appointed Dominion Archivist and Keeper of the Public Records. "Library and Archives Canada," http://www.collectionscanada.ca/king/05320113/053201130416_e.html

London Evening Standard,⁹¹ whose influence extended far beyond their various newspapers, and to a sympathetic coterie of local journalists including literary critic John Reade of the *Gazette*, author of the newspaper's 'Old and New' column, and Samuel Groves, owner/editor of the *Westmount News*, both of whom wrote flattering pieces on the McCord Museum. Hugh Graham, editor of the *Montreal Star*, a newspaper to which McCord contributed historical articles, was another supporter.⁹²

Ideally, the class of visitor McCord hoped to attract to his 'temple of learning' was summed up in a quote by Caxton, one of several, some still in the original Greek, which adorned the entrance to Temple Grove. McCord substituted 'museum' for 'book' to read as follows:

This Museum is not for every rude and unconnyng man to see, but for clerkys and very gentylmen that understand gentylness and scyence.⁹³

In William Caxton's time, being a gentleman meant a man of 'gentle' as opposed to 'common' birth, a member of the gentry, whose independent means permitted him the leisure to pursue learning.⁹⁴ For McCord's generation, far removed in both time and place from the practices of English feudalism, being a gentleman was both an indicator of social status and of values that, as the twentieth century approached, had little connection to landed property and more to do with personal conduct.⁹⁵

Finding authentic members of the English landed classes in early

⁹¹ Lord Beaverbrook, also known as Max Aitken, was another Conservative connection of McCord's. A Canadian financier, he left New Brunswick for Britain where he created the London based newspaper empire which included *The Evening Standard* and the *Daily Express*. During the World War I, he was asked by the Canadian government to create the Canadian War Records Office and the Canadian War Memorial Fund. During World War II, Lord Beaverbrook served as a Conservative cabinet minister under Prime Minister, Sir Winston Churchill. See A.J.P. Taylor, *Lord Beaverbrook* (London: H. Hamilton, 1972).

⁹² MCFP, File #2053. These names come from a file of letters from people who had been invited to McCord's museum at Temple Grove but couldn't attend. Invitations were extended to Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, the creator of Sherlock Holmes. He visited Canada as a guest of Goldwin Smith, former Oxford don, and another invitee to McCord's museum.

⁹³ MCFP, file #2065, McCord Room, "David McCord Notes & Suggestions."

⁹⁴ William Caxton (1422-1491), was a linguist, editor, printer and publisher, but is best known for having produced the first printed book in English. BBC, "Historic figures." http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/historic_figures/caxton_william.shtml

twentieth-century Montreal was not always easy. In an effort to find visitors for his museum worthy of the experience, McCord expanded his definition of gentleman to include a third group, the aristocracy of wealth. Invitations to view the collection were sent to rich Montreal businessmen, who, following the decision to move the collection to a public museum, were assiduously cultivated by McCord. In the days before personal income tax, when quick fortunes were being made in Montreal from transportation, finance, and manufacturing, activities in which McCord played a negligible part, his entry into the world of the 'Golden Square Mile' millionaire was gained through his status as a member of one of Montreal's oldest families. As a descendant of the old colonial governing elite, McCord could afford to be magnanimous about the contributions this new business class had made to the material progress of the city. In the years that followed, these were the people McCord would approach to finance his project of bringing the McCord collection to the public.

V

By 1916, Temple Grove was known to Montrealers as the 'Indian museum'. A flow of objects that by the second decade of the twentieth century had taken on the dimensions of a flood, threatened to swallow up every available space at the McCord home. Historical artifacts which had initially been displayed in the drawing and dining rooms now spread to cover every available surface in the house. The overflow spilled into the bedrooms on the floor above. If David McCord was to continue to collect, he needed a new space in which to expand his collection. For a decade he had been trying to give his collection away to a variety of institutions without much success. Frustrated by the effort, he wrote to his friend, W.D. Lighthall: "I am weary of trying to give away precious things!!"⁹⁵

What he sought and what was proving elusive to find was an institution, preferably an educational one, which would agree to provide him with a building

⁹⁵ See Geoffrey Best, *Mid-Victorian Britain, 1851-1875*, (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1971), pp. 245-246, and Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes, Men and women of the English middle-class* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), pp. 297-417.

⁹⁶ MCFP, file #2049, DRM to W.D. Lighthall, June 16, 1909.

and money for the maintenance of his collection. With his own revenues he would continue to pay for new acquisitions, or that was the plan. McGill University had been the main object of David McCord's attentions since 1909. The University had been reluctant to accept his gift, fearing that it had the potential of becoming a financial albatross.⁹⁷

In the first week of August 1916, David McCord experienced yet another setback. This time, it came in the form of a letter from the Gault brothers whom he had approached for the use of the Gault family mansion. Their letter to David McCord said simply that the house was not available because it was still occupied. In the rest of the world, events were taking a turn for the worse. In Europe, the war was at a stalemate with huge losses of life on both sides. In July, the British Army launched what they promised would be the decisive and winning battle of the war. On July 1st, on the first day of the Battle of the Somme, the British suffered the greatest loss of life in their entire military history. "The Somme marked the end of an age of vital optimism in British life that has never been recovered," wrote John Keegan.⁹⁸ That Britain, which controlled a quarter of the world's surface, was unable to advance more than a few yards on a French battlefield, demonstrated to the world that British superiority was no longer absolute. McCord knew families who had sent their young men to fight overseas. He was also a committed anglophile. The news would have been devastating.

At home there were problems as well. Letitia Chambers, David McCord's wife, was ailing. Suffering from curvature of the spine, she spent most of her waking hours in pain. Also, at the beginning of the year an old issue of domestic betrayal suddenly resurfaced, and would preoccupy the McCords for the entire year and beyond. Sometime in the later half of the 1880's, the McCords had adopted a girl named Edythe Rose. It was not a legal adoption, but the kind that was often arranged between the Protestant Orphan Asylum and the organization's wealthy patrons.⁹⁹ After the age of ten, male children were sent out to apprentice

⁹⁷ Stanley Brice Frost, *McGill University for the Advancement of Learning, Vol. II* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1980), p. 108.

⁹⁸ John Keegan, *The First World War* (Toronto: Vintage Canada, 1998), p. 299.

⁹⁹ NAC, Summerhill Home, MG 28, I 388, Vol. 12, file 2.

or to work as hired hands for the families who were supporters of the Asylum, while female children became domestic servants, or in the case of the McCords, were welcomed into the household as companions or surrogate children.¹⁰⁰ With the boys, the relationship between patron and child was less ambiguous, but among the girls the line between domestic servant and adopted daughter could be inconstant. Were these children servants or daughters? Boundaries could be equivocal. Given the circumstances, confusion was bound to arise in the hearts and minds of both parties, making conflict an integral part of their relationships. David McCord recorded an incident that took place between Edythe and Letitia McCord in the winter of 1887 that reveals some of the tensions:

Edythe has of late become more and more disrespectful & insubordinate, and has given us a great deal of trouble. Yesterday she struck Mrs. McCord twice and called her all the low names she could think of, refused to do her work all day and finally at about six o'clock left the place. This has given us more anxiety than you may imagine lest some harm might happen to her.... She went outside the house and sulked for hours and refused to come in & I finally left. She had no reason for all this, a postal card came yesterday. Mrs. McCord who assists her in writing her letters wished to see it in answer to a letter Mrs. McCord had written to Mrs. B_____ in Ottawa. ...when Mrs. McCord asked to see the address, all the trouble came. Edythe acted like one demented, and screamed at the top of her voice. There was no other provocation.¹⁰¹

Edythe may have found life at Temple Grove difficult to bear as a child, but with the exception of a few years absence following her marriage, she would spend much of her life at Temple Grove.

In 1913, Edythe became engaged to a man named Eddy Sayers. Both of the McCords questioned the wisdom of her choice but Edythe would not be dissuaded. They had their worst fears confirmed when the couple ran off with the McCord's jewelry that summer. Two and a half years later Eddy Sayers, now married to Edythe and father of her two children, was writing to the McCords begging for their forgiveness and for their help. What follows are the first letters

¹⁰⁰ There is no record of Edythe Rose being an inmate of the Protestant Orphan Asylum but the records are incomplete. Given the McCord's longstanding connection to the Asylum, and Letitia McCord's involvement in the Ladies Benevolent Society, it is likely that Edythe Rose came to them this way.

exchanged in a correspondence that would continue over most of the year.

Dear Mr and Mrs McCord For three years or more, we have been in the US, away from my Parents and Montreal, wandering like a coward it seems and a sin on my conscience. I have decided to write and ask for your forgiveness, I have been leading and making an honest living with my wife Edythe and the two children we have had, we have got a baby Boy born on the 25 of June 1914, and on the 15 of December 1915, for a Christmas present we had a lovely Baby girl so you see, we have been very good. Edythe & I are very sorry for our sins and have prayed to God to forgive us and give us good luck, but we haven't your forgiveness as yet, I have been working here ever since we left Montreal and worked very hard for my wife and two childrens and all suddenly, business have been dropping and now I have to look for a better position, Edyth suggested Montreal so that we could repay you for our ungratfullness, as my family are there, and they are growing old children would certainly like to know their Grand Mother and Father, Montreal isn't my native land but I have always love Canada, and we are all alone here, Edythe tell's me that she will personally (sic) make a clear confession of what has happen in your residence on that Sunday 1913, we wont (sic) mention nothing in this letter but will tell you personally, not only a confession, but with your forgiveness if I can find work in Montreal I will stand and pay you back what ever loss you valued at the time, this I respect and for the sake of our childrens (sic) I we (sic) beg for your forgiveness, please, We remain sincerilly (sic) Mr & Mrs Eddy Sayers, General Delivery Rochester, NH
If we are worth your forgiveness write and let us know.¹⁰²

The letter elicited the following reply from David McCord:

Sir and Edythe,

Before I say one word on the subject-matter of your letters - I want the return of the jewelery stolen. If in your or Edythe's possession - or if not, an exact statement of what was done with each piece - to whom disposed of, the date & what was got for them. You will be perfectly able to do this. I also want to know what became of the _____ seal in the leather case and the medals almost all taken. those were family heirlooms, specially dear to us, which money cannot replace and known as such to Edythe. Even Mrs McCord's engagement ring was stolen - that was a bond of union between me and her - Edythe as a woman should have spared Mrs. McCord this special pain. The large emerald and diamond ring Edythe also knew I had given her as a return for her kindness and hard work in relieving me of labour. You two can have no conception of the pain you caused us. Mrs. McCord sometimes thought the matter would have [killed crossed

¹⁰¹ MCFP, File #1815, general correspondence, DRM to Mrs. Micklephon?, Feb. 24, 1887. Punctuation and emphasis in the original.

¹⁰² MCFP, File #1815, general correspondence, Eddy Sayers to DRM, Rochester, New Hampshire, January 10, 1916. Punctuation and emphasis in the original.

outlended her life. We are much pleased that you did not abandon her. We hope that the children may be a means of Grace to return you both to the proper paths.

Mrs. McCord desires me to say, that she always felt that Edythe, if alive, would sooner or later write to her & she was not surprized (sic) in this sense when her letter came in yesterday. We _____ advertized (sic) that if she were in trouble to write us. We have daily prayed that you both might repent.¹⁰³

Aided by the McCords, the Sayers returned to Montreal towards the end of 1916. In response to the request that Eddy Sayers furnish David McCord with a list of all the stolen articles and their whereabouts, the best that the former could do was to direct the latter to St. Denis St., where most of the jewelry had been sold. David and Letitia McCord actively encouraged the family's relocation by promising them the use of one of their properties rent free. David McCord also used his contacts to try to find work for Eddy Sayers on the railway. With their new proximity, the Sayers made additional financial demands on the McCords. Unpaid bills and lawsuits brought against the Sayers ended up at the McCords' door. At some point in the 1920s, they moved into Temple Grove ostensibly to become the McCords' butler and housekeeper. This arrangement proved to be in many ways disastrous to the McCords, who continued to be the object of theft, this time by a younger generation of Sayers.¹⁰⁴ Mrs. McCord, who remained loyal to the Sayers throughout, was adamant that "the Sayers had served her well...."¹⁰⁵ Her husband thought otherwise:

Mrs. McCord in her weak condition is no match for such characters as Eddie and Morgan.... Our relations with Eddie and his wife all along were simply charitable - pure kindness. The kind of help Mrs. McCord has been getting has been most unsatisfactory.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ MCFP, file #1815, general correspondence, DRM to Eddy Sayers, Temple Grove, January 13, 1916. Punctuation and emphasis in the original.

¹⁰⁴ MCFP, file #2008, McCord Estate, W.D. Lighthall to W.S. Lighthall, December 16, 1926. Eddie Sayers was dismissed by Mrs. McCord for the theft of the library clock sometime at the end of 1923 or the beginning of 1924. See MCFP file #3003, Homewood Correspondence between DRM and LCM, January 28, 1924.

¹⁰⁵ MCFP, file #2008, McCord Estate, W.D. Lighthall to W.S. Lighthall, December 16, 1926.

¹⁰⁶ MCFP file #3004, Homewood Correspondence Lighthall and Others, DRM to W.D. Lighthall, March 27, 1924.

In an ironic twist of fate, it was Eddie Sayers who became the caretaker of Temple Grove and guardian of its contents in the last years when David McCord was mostly living at Homewood Sanitarium in Hamilton and Letitia McCord was bedridden in Montreal. Hired by W.D. Lighthall, who managed the McCords' affairs, Eddy Sayers was kept at Temple Grove to spy on Letitia McCord's relatives, who were thought to be plotting to seize the McCord estate for themselves. In a report written by W.D. Lighthall to his son, the official curator, Lighthall goes to some length to describe the Shakespearean drama that was unfolding at Temple Grove in January of 1927, the year before Letitia McCord's death:

...Eddy Sayers called also. He wished much to see you. He reports the conditions at the house very hard for himself and wife, Dr. McCord very wild, restraining himself before callers, but obscene and blasphemous to the last degree when they are not present, and very dirty in his habits. Cuthbert Regan was there Sat. the 7th in the evening four hours. He was trying hard to persuade Mrs. McCord to make a will in his favor, altho (sic) she protested that she has made one leaving all to her husband. he (sic) also pressed her to give him all the money in her bank and let him keep it in his - evidently for the purpose of converting it to his own use, (altho (sic) he knows it is Dr. McCord's money not hers). She has thus far refused.

He now admitted to E.S. [Eddy Sayers] that there is nothing to gain by proceedings, since he admits that Dr. McCord is very insane and incapable of making a new will. He has also come to the conclusion that there is much less in the Estate than he once thought. (Mrs. McCord also told E.S. there is nothing to gain by changing the administration, as things are just as well as they are).

However, C. Regan has been urging Dr. McCord to replace you by the Crown Trust, telling him Kerry so advises, and that the Crown Trust would bring him in 12 per cent on the capital and that the McCord's (sic) could live in a small apartment.¹⁰⁷

Cuthbert Regan, Letitia McCord's nephew, did eventually succeed in emptying his Aunt's bank account, but was frustrated in his attempts to divert the McCord estate from David McCord's chosen beneficiary, McGill University. Eddy Sayers was to receive his reward from the McCord estate, but Lighthall, hoping to reduce

¹⁰⁷ MCFP, file #3008, McCord Estate, W.D. Lighthall to W.S. Lighthall, Montreal, January 9. 1927. Punctuation and emphasis in the original.

the sum owed Sayers, proposed to the principal of McGill, Sir Arthur Currie, that a job for Sayers be found at the university:

I have in view a sum of money which would remunerate him to a certain extent, but the matter would be a good deal simplified if McGill University could give him a position such as janitor or something of that kind for which I think he is capable and in which he would render good service.¹⁰⁸

Five months later Lighthall was still begging the university for a job for Sayers. Apparently the administration did not feel the same compunction to reward Sayers for what Lighthall described as “services of a confidential nature necessary to protect the estate....”¹⁰⁹

The year the Sayers returned to Montreal, David McCord was in his seventy-third year. Fearing he was approaching the end of his life, David McCord began to redouble his efforts at cataloguing his collection. In his youth David McCord had learned the practices of inventory science from his father, an amateur meteorologist, and from his participation in the Natural History Society. His training had taught him the importance of record keeping and written documentation as a way of establishing the provenance of objects. “I have subordinated all other considerations to those of truth – the soul of history. The size of stones in buildings have been marked and the courses of the masonry counted, the number of the panes of glass indicated and the construction of the beams of roofs correctly represented... No detail has been too insignificant for reproduction.”¹¹⁰ Historical truth for McCord was in the details. It was during this period that McCord started his campaign to acquire the provincial archives “now merged with those of the rest of the Dominion.”¹¹¹

With poor health restricting his movements, McCord sat, slowly sifting through the thousands of objects stored in his childhood home, the only home he

¹⁰⁸ McGill Archives, file # RG4, F:10696, C:0096, “McCord, D.R., Estate & Donation - McCord Museum, 1908-1935,” W.D. Lighthall to Sir Arthur Currie, May 23, 1930.

¹⁰⁹ McGill Archives, file # RG4, F:10696, C:0096, “McCord, D.R., Estate & Donation - McCord Museum, 1908-1935,” W.D. Lighthall to A.P.S. Glassco, October 3, 1930.

¹¹⁰ MCFP, “Catalogue of Original Paintings in Oil and Water Colour Illustrative of the History of Canada,” Vol. 1.

¹¹¹ MCFP, file #2048, DRM to Ernest Decary, Chairman of Commissioners of City of Montreal, July 31, 1918.

knew, Temple Grove. Examining, labeling, and recording, is a long and painstaking process, involving the hand and the eye in a repetitive gesture of remembrance. The past revisits us in old age. Experts say that our capacity for immediate recall diminishes while our long-term autobiographical memory becomes more alive.¹¹² With pen in hand David McCord began to inscribe on the back of one of his most cherished possessions, the Bartlett print purchased from W.D. Lighthall:

It is interesting to mark the pediment and wings of Temple Grove in this Bartlett picture especially coupled with my destiny in having collected here the materials for the National Museum, to bear my name....

The pillars and pediment of Temple Grove have been the dominant feature of the Mountain in all general pictures of Montreal, since its creation. This on the back of which I now write was the first of such since the house was built in 1837 or 8 and so it has been down to the great commercial picture of a few years ago by Wiseman. In my large Duncan picture of 1832 painted for my father it does such, of course, appear. The trees have grown very much in this interval. There is an example of such in the comparatively small size at the present a great white birch on the left of the observer as portrayed in my large view of the city by this same artist of 1851 or 52 painted for Dr. McCulloch and taken from this very Temple Grove garden! When our old friend John Kerry came out to this country from England in November 1849, by way of New York, Lake Champlain, St. Johns and finally crossed the river from Laprairie the principal object which met his eye on the side of the mountain overlooking the city where he had elected to make his home was these pillars and the pediment. This Mr. Kerry told me himself and he repeated it to his son, who to-day communicated to me the year of his arrival.¹¹³

The watercolour DRM used as a notepad for his memorializing was not as he believed it to be, a painting by W.D. Bartlett.¹¹⁴ Nor was it entitled 'The Principal View of Montreal'. Confusion over name and origins is further compounded by the inaccuracies found in McCord's own text. On the reverse side

¹¹² One of the features of autobiographical memory in the elderly is a tendency to engage in what experts call 'life review', the resolving of past experiences through the reworking of memories from the years ten to thirty. See Martin Conway, *Autobiographical Memory: An Introduction* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1990), p. 154.

¹¹³ MCFP, file#2065, 'Early Museum Accession Register', paintings and notes, DRM, August 15, 1916.

¹¹⁴ W.D. Bartlett sketched a very similar scene which later appeared as an engraving in Nathaniel Parker Willis's *Canadian Scenery* (London: 1840), but according to Conrad Graham, curator of objects at the McCord Museum of Canadian History, this was a copy. Apparently copying Bartlett engravings was a popular pastime in Montreal during this period.

of the painting he writes: “it is interesting to mark the pediment and wings of Temple Grove in this Bartlett picture,” even though none are visible. Only an eye trained by a lifetime of sighting pediment and pillars on the mountainside could possibly find evidence of their existence in ‘The Principal View’. In both the original Bartlett sketch and the copy owned by McCord, Temple Grove appears as a small, barely distinguishable smudge against the more imposing but equally undefined flank of Mount Royal. In McCord’s rendering of ‘The Principal View’, Temple Grove is embellished with architectural details that make it the ‘dominant feature of the Mountain in all general pictures of Montreal since its creation’.

Temple Grove was probably the most visible landmark on Mount Royal in 1838 and in the decades that followed -- only the McTavish monument was positioned to make a similar claim on the eye -- but neither the McCord copy nor Bartlett’s original provide confirmation of McCord’s subjective view. Why then did McCord select ‘The Principal View of Montreal’ as his memory board when other scenes, James Duncan’s ‘View from Temple Grove’ for example, which was commissioned by his father and presented to him on his twenty-first birthday by his mother, were souvenirs of a more personal kind? Why then, is this picture so susceptible to misrepresentation? And finally what does his remaking of ‘The Principal View’ tell us about his ‘habits of mind and sentiments’, and of his place in the imagined world of this Bartlett painting?

The watercolour McCord attributed to Bartlett was actually a copy of a Bartlett engraving entitled ‘Montreal from the St. Lawrence’, found reproduced in Nathaniel Parker Willis’s *Canadian Scenery*. **(Figure 9)** A journeyman artist trained in architectural drawing, W. D. Bartlett made his living painting picturesque scenes of England, Europe, and the Middle East, which were used to illustrate travel books. In 1836-7, 1838, and again in 1841, Bartlett visited North America to make the preliminary sketches for two books of the same genre, *American Scenery and Canadian Scenery*, written by Willis and published in London.¹¹⁵ Bartlett’s engraving was faithful to its title, ‘Montreal from the St.

¹¹⁵ See W.D. Bartlett by Alexander M. Ross, *DCB* online, <http://www.biographi.ca/EN/ShowBio.asp?BioId=37890&query=bartlett>, cited January 5, 2006.

Lawrence', depicting Montreal in 1838 as a pre-industrial port from the vantage point of the River. The largest object in the drawing appears in the foreground: a log raft transporting passengers, one of whom has raised his arm in salutation to a passing ship. Other sailing vessels dot the harbour, including a steamboat, smoke curling from its funnel, the only harbinger of change in this otherwise timeless landscape. The



Figure 9, "Montreal from the St. Lawrence," engraving by unknown artist but thought to be Bartlett (M333)

activities on the River unfold before the backdrop formed by Montreal's built environment. On this second visual plain the eye is centered by the towers belonging to the former Notre Dame Church and to the Anglican Church, providing a frame within a frame for Notre Dame Cathedral, the only distinguishing landmark in a scene otherwise bereft of architectural detail. Lacking visual information, the viewer is encouraged to use the imagination to fill in the appropriate details, making associations between other times and places. Bartlett's reputation as an artist was based on his ability to render foreign scenes recognizable to a public, the vast majority of whom were English, whose experience of distant places was limited to the perusal of travel books. This may explain why Montreal appears as it does, more Mediterranean port than principal city of British North America, more ancient than modern. The twin summits of Mount Royal provide a touch of the picturesque, an expression of nature that naturalizes the socio-political arrangements captured by this frame.

When Bartlett traveled to Montreal in the summer of 1838 to sketch the city, he brought with him a set of artistic conventions informed by the picturesque, a type of landscape painting made famous in England at the end of the eighteenth-century. The picturesque helped define a new way of seeing both the 'natural' world and aspects of the social world which it reflected. Pictures of mountain tops, wooded valleys, rushing rivers, and winding country roads peopled by humble folk pursuing their traditional occupations, became de rigueur. Professionals and amateurs alike traveled to the English countryside to paint their native landscape firsthand, thus initiating the practice of sketching out-of-doors. The goal of the picturesque was to make English landscape look more like a painting, and painting look like a 'natural' landscape.¹¹⁶ Prior to the invention of the picturesque, the ideal of beauty had been identified with non-English landscapes like the Alps, or closer to home, with scenes showing the large, impeccably landscaped gardens of the British aristocracy. By broadening the definition of what constituted ideal beauty to include the 'real landscape' of the English countryside, picturesque landscape drawing helped democratize ways of seeing. This democratic impulse was furthered by the guide and travel books like the ones illustrated by Bartlett, which created a mass market for these images, bringing landscapes of the sublime into the lives of ordinary people who otherwise had no contact with academic painting. "The picturesque ... represented a landscape both familiar and accessible. It thus could be widely consumed, and with all the more enthusiasm in that the landscape it celebrated was beginning to vanish."¹¹⁷

In England the picturesque perpetuated an idealized version of rural landscape that was quickly passing from view. While artists were busy scrambling up hillsides in search of the unspoiled rustic, economic and social forces set in motion by the industrial revolution were already undermining the foundations of this world commemorated by sketchpad and canvas. The picturesque love of the ruined and the dilapidated was in keeping with the period's general elegiac mood

¹¹⁶ Ann Bermingham, *Landscape and Ideology* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1986), p. 57.

¹¹⁷ Bermingham, p. 85.

and graveyard melancholy. Coming at the height of the agricultural transformation of the countryside, the picturesque was suited to express the complexity of the historical moment. In its celebration of the irregular, preenclosed landscape, the picturesque harkened back nostalgically to an old order of rural paternalism. In its portrayal of dilapidation and ruin, the picturesque sentimentalized the loss of this old order.¹¹⁸

In Lower Canada the landscape was responding to economic and social pressures of its own. The issue here was not enclosure but the replacement of the French seigneurial system with British freehold land tenure. A small but powerful minority made up of English industrialists, artisans, and capitalist landowners were chafing under the restrictions imposed by the last vestiges of the French *ancien régime*. John Samuel McCord was one of the early members of the seigneurial commission set up to negotiate the complexities of this dual system.¹¹⁹ The growing pressure to make a commodity out of land was reshaping the 'natural' landscape, but it was a French 'nature' that was being reconstituted from an English point of view. Brian Young makes this same point but with different emphasis when he writes: "commutation must be seen not as a process of 'Anglicization' (although that was one possible result), but as part of the larger transition in Lower Canada from feudalism to industrial capitalism."¹²⁰

Bartlett (unwittingly or not) represented this struggle over land by showing the Mountain in its 'natural' state, devoid of peasant holdings and symbols of private property. The only exception is John Samuel McCord's new summer house, Temple Grove, completed the same year as the sketch. Although barely visible, Temple Grove is nonetheless a sign of the times, an indicator of the direction land use will soon take in the area bordered by the Mountain. In the 'Principal View', time stops at the summer of 1838, just as Montreal hovers on the brink of the Industrial Revolution and political rebellion. In Quebec historiography this date is of special significance because it marks the second

¹¹⁸ Ibid, p. 70.

¹¹⁹ Pamela Miller et al., p. 45.

¹²⁰ See Brian Young, *In its Corporate Capacity: The Seminary of Montreal As a Business Institution, 1816-1876* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1986).

attempt by *Patriote* forces to wrestle power away from the British colonial state. In Bartlett's drawing, Notre Dame Cathedral occupies the centre of the frame, a powerful reminder of the importance of the French language and of Roman Catholicism in this the largest city in British North America. Here, Notre Dame Cathedral still dominates the old *ancien régime* city, but the city itself is overshadowed by the mountain and the St. Lawrence River. Mount Royal measures three times the size of Notre Dame Cathedral, but taller still are the masts of the mercantile sailing ships that fill the harbour. The river is wide compared to the narrow band of buildings that constitutes Montreal and full of activity, whereas the city appears almost moribund, fixed in time and place. The movement on the 'mighty St. Lawrence' underscores the importance of the commercial and forwarding activities of the English Protestant mercantile class to the fortunes of Montreal.¹²¹

In 1838 this group was still dreaming of making their city the centre for a vast commercial empire. Committed to political union of Upper and Lower Canada, which they hoped would finally put an end to the political strife of the past two decades between *Patriotes* and British Party, Montreal's merchants were envisioning a mega-project of canal building and general improvements paid for by British Government loans that would remake the St. Lawrence River into the most important transportation route on the continent. Under this scheme Montreal would replace New York as the principal warehouse for goods passing to and from North America to England. Only the steamboat and its telltale ribbon of smoke hints in the picture at the future changes that will transform this city beyond recognition by century's end.

The picturesque was an aesthetic of nostalgia, and herein lies its attraction for David Ross McCord. Looking back over the last eighty years of Montreal's history with his copy of Bartlett's engraving close at hand, McCord is reviving a pre-industrial Montreal, not yet geographically divided into the post-rebellion

¹²¹ For more about Montreal's mercantile elite see Gerald Tulchinsky, *The River Barons: Montreal Businessmen and the Growth of Industry and Transportation, 1837-1853*. Historian George Bervin discusses Quebec City's commercial class in *Québec au XIX siècle: L'activité économique des grands marchands*.

'two solitudes', and still in British hands. It is also the city of his father's early middle years, when a healthy John Samuel McCord was still trying to find a place among the local gentry. It was a city his parents, but especially his mother, was prone to tell stories about. In 1838 Montreal's cityscape still bore the traces of its *ancien régime* origins. The fortifications had been dismantled but the pattern of streets had not changed significantly.¹²² During the next eighty years Montreal would go from being a small town with a population of 9,000 in 1800 to a modern metropolis of some 300,000 people in 1901.¹²³ For these reasons and more, the moment immortalized by Bartlett's drawing was important to remember.

Literary critic Evelyn Hinz writes, "nothing so characterizes the archaic mind-set as a concern with origins, and surely this is the distinguishing feature of auto/biography." David McCord's interest in origins, I argue in Chapter Three, stemmed from his preoccupation with his place within the family but especially in relation to his father. But that is only part of the story. McCord also saw his life work as 'Canada's handmaiden', keeper of the traditions on which the country's greatness would rest for future generations. Hinz goes on to say:

What both also have in common is that the impetus for ritual act derives from a crisis situation or a sense of vulnerability (a feeling of diminished status/power) and both reflect a belief that a return to origins is a means of recuperating lost vitality and stability. Thus, the more we want to argue that auto/biography is not a nostalgic project, the more we should recall that in archaic ritual, too, the return to the past is a way of canceling historical contingencies and of enabling a fresh start.¹²⁴

In 1916 David McCord was in desperate need of a fresh start. His project of opening a museum was falling on deaf ears. King Edward VII had just died, and internationally, the failure of Britain to strike a decisive victory on the battlefield during the early stages of the Great War signaled its declining power. The stimulus to return to the past in order to re-invent a future was coming from all

¹²² Jean-Claude Robert, *Atlas historique de Montréal* (Montréal: Libre Expression, 1994), p. 90, writes that the number of streets increased from 100 to 173 during this period.

¹²³ See Newton Bosworth, *Hochelaga Depicta* (Montreal: William Greig, 1839), pp. 88-93 and Jean-Claude Robert, *Atlas historique de Montréal* (Montréal: Libre Expression, 1994), p. 78 For a discussion of the changes to Montreal in the 1880s and later see Richard Hemsley, *Looking Back* (Montreal: no publisher, 1930).

directions. Temple Grove, now on the streetcar line, but still perched above the city, was David Ross McCord's refuge but was also becoming a kind of hell. The servants were difficult, the property heavily mortgaged and in need of repair. It is no wonder David McCord wanted to start over in a new building. But wherever he went, Temple Grove would remain the basis of his symbolic universe from which he would generate historical meaning.

In the summer of that year a series of photographs were taken of him in his study at Temple Grove. One of the images, the one used by the current McCord Museum for its brochures, shows David McCord seated at his desk. **(Figure 10)** Behind him is a wall of books encased in glass cabinets. In his hands he holds a book open at a photograph, his finger poised to turn the page. It is a solemn image. Light coming from a window opposite David McCord illuminates his face, head, and hands, as well as the books at his back, but leaves the rest of the frame in darkness. Examined quickly the photograph shows a scholar of mature years at work in his study. It is a dignified portrait, or at least that is the impression the McCord Museum tries to convey in its publicity. David McCord does not face the camera but looks at the photographer from an angle, askance. Is he annoyed at the interruption in his work or is it suspicion that plays on his face? The other photos confirm the annoyance. In most of the frames he does not even look at the photographer. These shots are more candid and they reveal the face of a deeply troubled man. In 1922 David McCord would be diagnosed with homicidal dementia, but in this set of photographs the signs were already there. According to W. D. Lighthall, David McCord drank a bottle of whiskey a day until 1919.¹²⁵ Although it would be another six years before he would be admitted to the Protestant Hospital for the Insane, David McCord's mental and physical health had already begun to deteriorate.

¹²⁴ Evelyn Hinz, "Mimesis: The Dramatic Lineage of Auto/Biography," in *Essays on Life Writing: From Genre to Critical Practice*, ed. by Marlene Kadar, (Toronto: 1992), p. 207

¹²⁵ Homewood Sanitarium, patient files, David McCord.



Figure 10, David Ross McCord in his library, "Temple Grove," Montreal, 1916 (MP 2135-1N)

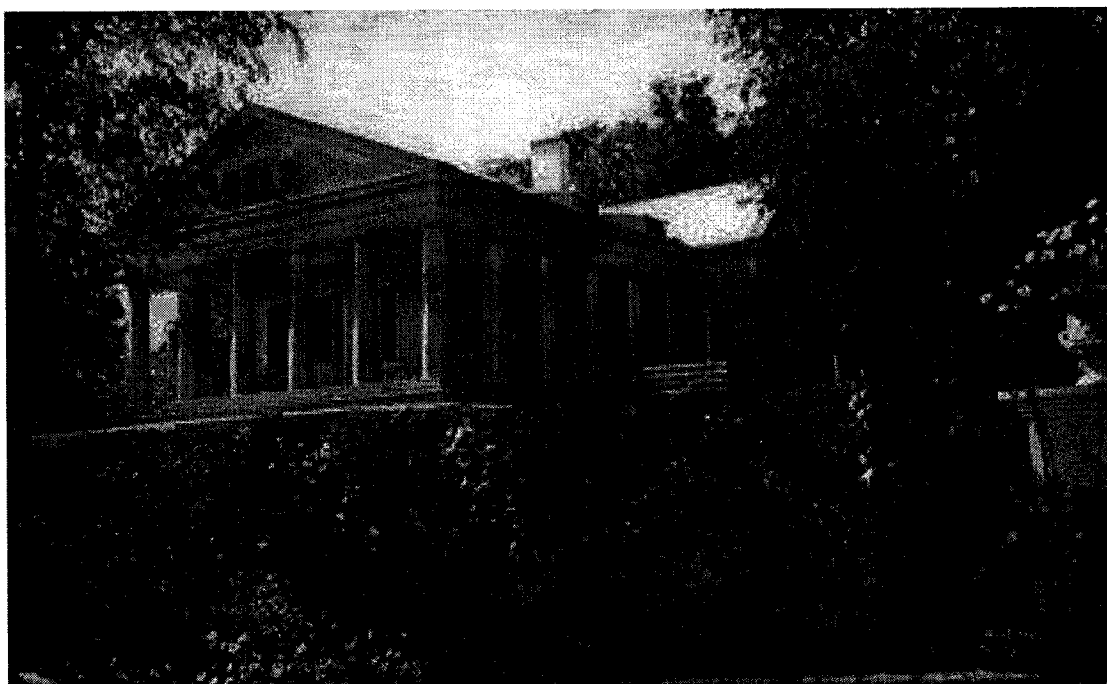


Figure 3, David Ross McCord's house "Temple Grove," Côte-des-Neiges, Montreal, 1872, by Henderson, (MP 0000.33.1)



Figure 4, Westerly view from the garden of annuals, "Temple Grove," 1872, by Henderson, (MP 0000.33.2)



Figure 5, Croquet Lawn at "Temple Grove," Côte-des-Neiges, 1872, by Henderson, (MP 0000.33.3)



Figure 6, Bridge and arbour at "Temple Grove," Côte-des-Neiges, 1872, by Henderson, (MP 0000.33.4)

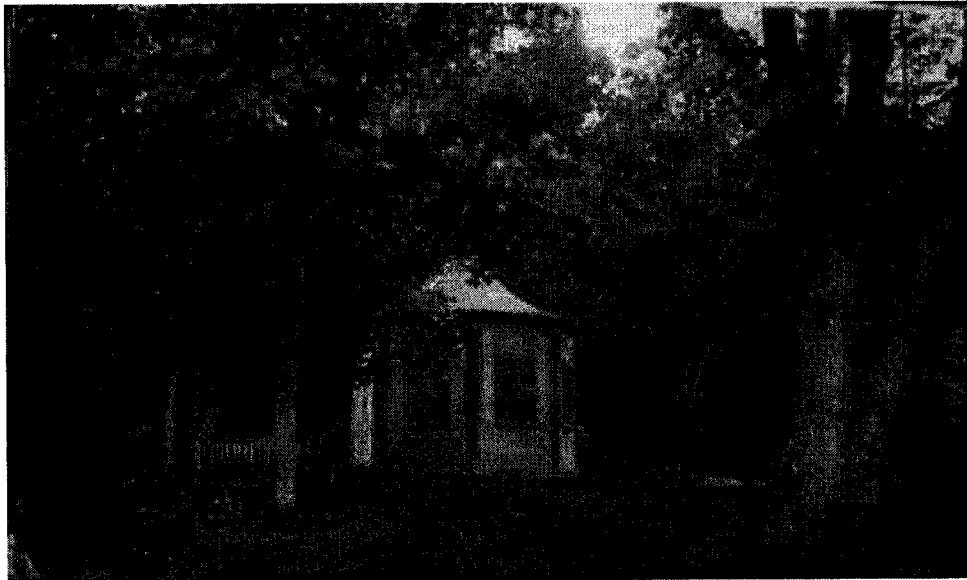


Figure 2, Summer house at "Temple Grove," 1872, by Henderson (MP 0000.33.5)

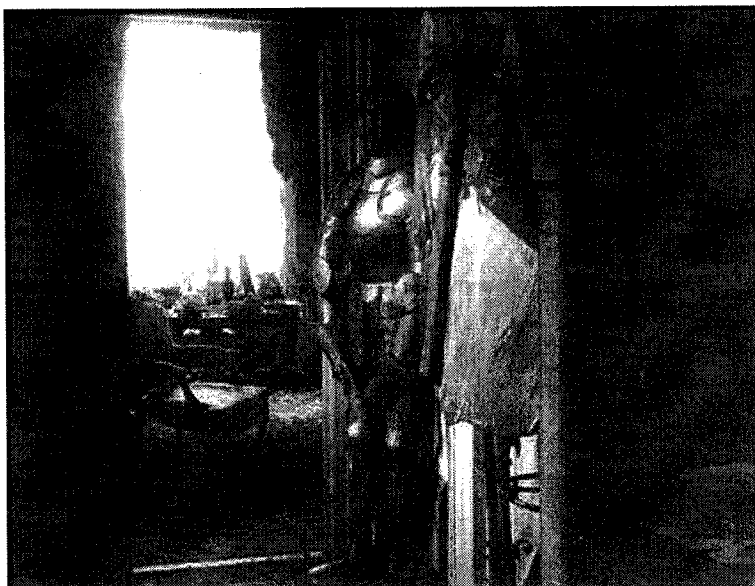


Figure 7, "Temple Grove," interior suite of armor, McCord Museum of Canadian History (MP 0000.2135.2N)



Figure 8, Artifacts and artwork inside "Temple Grove," Montreal, ca 1916, (MP 2135.4)

Chapter Five: The Way to 'Dilcoosha'

My work is just beginning, but it is drawing to a close. Suppose I should die, what would happen to this collection. No one but myself knows what is here. It is scattered about and needs to be put together. The time has come when something has to be done.¹

- David Ross McCord

...the twentieth century shall be the century of Canada and of Canadian development. For the next seventy-five years, nay for the next hundred years, Canada shall be the star towards which all men who love progress and freedom shall come. To those, sir, who have life before them, let my prayer be this: Remember from this day forth, never to look simply at the horizon as it may be limited by the limits of the Province, but look abroad over all the continent... and let your motto be: "Canada first, Canada last, and Canada always."²

- Sir Wilfrid Laurier

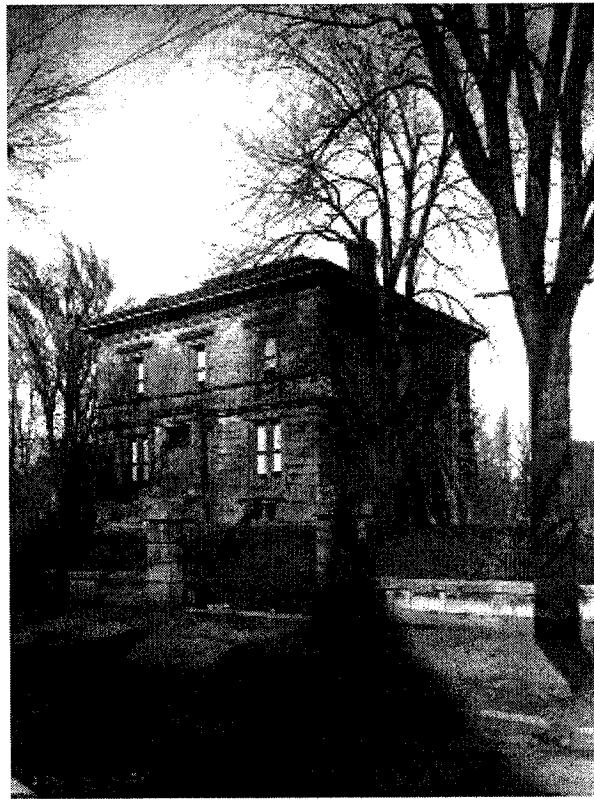


Figure 1, Joseph House, (MP180)

¹ David Ross McCord, as quoted in *The Daily Telegraph*, October 20, 1910, p. 1.

² Sir Wilfrid Laurier as quoted in Mark Kingwell and Christopher Moore, *Canada Our Century* (Toronto: Doubleday Canada, 1999), p. 69.

On July 25, 1919 McGill University finally made it official: the McCord National Museum would soon open its doors in the old Joseph House known as 'Dilcoosha', on the corner of Sherbrooke and McTavish streets in downtown Montreal. It had taken David McCord more than a decade to convince the university to let him have the building, ten years spent in what became a bitter contest of wills between McCord and William Peterson, the University's principal.³ McCord had approached other potential benefactors: the federal government and province of Quebec, the City of Westmount and the University of Toronto to name a few. But none corresponded so well to his vision of having a national history museum named for him, on the most prestigious street in Canada's only metropolis.

Moving his 'Indian' collection, which was then on display at his home on C tes-des-Neiges Road, to the McCord National Museum on the McGill campus proved much more difficult than McCord had imagined. The way to 'Dilcoosha', or 'Heart's Delight' (Hindustani 'Dil Khusha'), was strewn with obstacles. McCord's own personality, unpractised as it was in the art of compromise, his failing mental health, and declining finances all got in the way. Disruptions caused by World War I added to the length of the process, as did the attitude of Peterson and others on the McGill University Board of Governors who did not share McCord's passion for Canadian history. In this act of retracing is found knowledge not only of one individual and his milieu, but insight into the process of history-making itself, which in this context meant nothing less than creating a usable past for what McCord and others hoped would be "Canada's 'conserving conservative' century."

How McCord came to acquire his 'Heart's Delight', like all good stories, has its share of dramatic plot twists and a cast of eccentric characters. In McCord's own mythological mode of telling, 'Dilcoosha' represented the

³ William Peterson was principal of McGill University from 1895 to 1919. A classical scholar by training, he studied at both the University of Edinburgh and Oxford University. Peterson was also considered a gifted administrator. At the age of twenty-six, before coming to McGill, he was appointed the first principal of Dundee College. During his principalship McGill gained an international reputation for its medical and scientific achievements. See Stanley Brice Frost,

coveted place of arrival in a heroic vision-quest to recover knowledge of Canada's past.⁴ In a letter written by David McCord to a supporter in the summer of 1919 following the official confirmation of the transfer of McCord's collection to McGill University, he described the ordeal in the following manner. Comparing himself to the biblical Jacob, he paraphrased Deuteronomy 32:9-10⁵ saying:

The Lord also found me in a desert land, very desert historically, in the sense that no one had thought of saving the landmarks. He led me about (the whole land). He directed my steps...listened to my voice 'crying in the wilderness,' with the happy result that more than a solid foundation has been made for a museum.⁶

Calling himself the "handmaid of Canada," McCord saw his mission as divinely inspired, providing Canadians with a story of their past that they could use to battle against the dark forces of French-Canadian nationalism and American imperialism.⁷ In a letter published by the *Montreal Herald*, McCord summed up his feelings towards the American republic. "I sometimes think how fortunate it was for Canada that forty years ago, even thirty years ago, the Americans showed such a lack of statesmanship or prescience in their attitude towards us. There was a time when the results of the cultivation of friendship might have been what we would now denominate as disastrous to every higher interest."⁸ If Canada was to avoid the fate spelled out in the McCord National Museum's first motto, "When there is no vision the people will perish," it would need a unifying myth to remind citizens of their distinguished place within the most powerful empire on earth.⁹

David McCord's use of biblical metaphor to describe his experience was not out of place in the nineteenth century. Christianity provided the ruling

McGill University for the Advancement of Learning, Vol. II, (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1984), pp. 4-7.

⁴ See Joseph Campbell with Bill Moyers, *The Power of Myth* (New York: Doubleday, 1988), p. 127.

⁵ "For the Lord's portion is his people: Jacob is the lot of his inheritance. He found him in a desert land, and in the waste howling wilderness; he led him about, he instructed him, he kept him as the apple of his eye." Deuteronomy 32: 9-10. *Bible*, King James Version (*KJ*).

⁶ MCFP file #5007, DRM to Mrs. Austin-Leigh of London, September 4, 1919.

⁷ *Ibid*.

⁸ *Montreal Herald*, "Letters to the Editor," no date. MCFP, file #2040.

⁹ *KJ*, Proverbs 29:18. Note that DRM only used part of the verse. The rest follows with "...and happy is he who keepeth the law."

metaphor in much the same way American pop culture has come to define how we imagine ourselves today. The quest-plot which he drew upon to structure his story took its inspiration from the Exodus-millennium myth which tells the story of the Israelites, who were deprived of their inheritance and forced to wander in the desert until, with God's help, they were restored to their original state in the promised land.¹⁰ By likening himself to Jacob, David McCord was drawing a parallel between the fortunes of Israel and those of Canada, in his view, two nations singled out by God to fulfill an important destiny in the world.

McCord was not alone in using ancient Israel to make a point about Canada's place within the British Empire. A few years earlier G. M. Grant, a spokesman for the Imperial cause in Canada and the principal of Queen's University, wrote, "We have a mission on earth as truly as ancient Israel had."¹¹ According to Carl Berger, "one of the most distinctive features of the imperialist mind was the tendency to infuse religious emotion into secular purposes."¹²

Casting himself more as the high priest rather than lowly handmaid, David McCord saw his museum project as infusing Canadian nationalism with the authority of Christian narrative. At the heart of the nation of Israel was the sacred temple where the chosen came to practice their faith and renew their covenant with God. Worshipping the Lord in one central place as opposed to a multitude of shrines was one of the most important teachings of Deuteronomy.¹³ 'Dilcoosha' was to be Canada's sacred temple where Canadians from all across the country would gather for instruction and to renew their faith in a Canadian national identity.

II

¹⁰ Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University, 1957, 1990), p. 191.

¹¹ Carl Berger, *The Sense of Power: Studies in the Ideas of Canadian Imperialism, 1867-1914* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1970), p. 218.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 217.

¹³ Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, p. 199.

On a more mundane level, McCord's twenty-year quest to find a public home for his collection involved him in a more worldly pursuit after the company of prime ministers, bishops, and millionaires. To this network of powerful men were added local professionals whose shared connections were forged for the most part in university classrooms, on sports fields and parade grounds, in church pews, Masonic temples and private clubs in and around Montreal's 'Golden Square Mile'. The making of the McCord National Museum is also the story of how David McCord managed to trade on his connections and on the McCord family name.

William Douw Lighthall was one person who was instrumental in helping McCord bring his collection to the public. A close friend of the McCord family and, following the interdictment of David McCord in 1922, the curator of the family's estate, Lighthall used his influence both at McGill University and Westmount City Council to try to obtain a building that would be suitable for McCord's museum. When McCord turned to Lighthall for help with his museum project, he was calling on a man whose reputation as a leader in municipal politics and Canadian cultural life was already well established.¹⁴ A string of successful civic projects brought to fruition by Lighthall made his reputation as a "Big Municipal Man" not only in Montreal but across Canada.¹⁵ In 1895, while a member of the Historical Monuments Commission, Lighthall was instrumental in securing the erection of the Maisonneuve monument in Place d'Armes Square. The following year, Lighthall founded the Château de Ramezay Museum of History in collaboration with de Léry Macdonald. That same year he also participated in the founding of the Canadian Landmarks Association. It appears as though there was nothing Lighthall would not or could not do in the domain of municipal politics and culture. Though a lawyer by profession – he was named

¹⁴ For more on the ideas and career of William Douw Lighthall (1857-1954), see Donald Wright, "W. D. Lighthall and David McCord: Antimodernism and English-Canadian Imperialism, 1880s-1918," *Journal of Canadian Studies*, Vol. 32, No. 2, (summer 1997), pp. 134-153, Donald Wright, "W.D. Lighthall: Sometime Confederation Poet, Sometime Urban Reformer," M.A. History, McGill University, 1991, and Richard Virr, "Son of the Great Dominion: W.D. Lighthall and the Lighthall Papers," *Fontanus*, No. 2, 1989, pp. 103-109.

¹⁵ NAC, Lighthall Papers, MG29093, Vol. I, Box 26, Correspondence 1914, *The Western Municipal News*.

King's Counsel in 1906 – his interests nevertheless went beyond law or even politics. While president of the Antiquarian and Numismatic Society, he undertook a series of archaeological digs near Mount Royal to unearth the remains of what he believed to be the original Native settlement of Hochelaga. It was a story he felt especially drawn to and one that he would write about as a novelist and as an historian. His *Sons of the Great Dominion* published in 1889, was also one of the first anthologies of Canadian poetry.

In 1897, Lighthall was elected to the Westmount Town Council where he displayed strong support for a plan to build a public library in Westmount Park, the first of its kind in Quebec.¹⁶ Four years later, while serving as mayor of Westmount, he co-founded the Union of Canadian Municipalities with the mayor of Toronto, to ensure that, “Canadian people shall not be ruled by any irresponsible monopoly.”¹⁷ He took this action as part of a battle waged between Westmount Town Council and the Montreal Light, Heat and Power Company to decide who had ultimate jurisdiction over the streets of Westmount.¹⁸ In this struggle, like most he engaged in during his long career, Lighthall ultimately prevailed.

There was much about William Douw Lighthall's public record that, in form, if not in actual content, recalled the career of David McCord's father, John Samuel McCord. A generation earlier, John Samuel had displayed a similar commitment to civic duty rooted in a strong religious faith through his work as commander of Montreal's volunteer militia during the Rebellions of 1837-38, as Superior Court judge, and in middle-age, as chief officer in a number of high-minded civic associations. Like Lighthall, John Samuel had enjoyed widespread respect from his peers and moved easily in the top circles of political power.

¹⁶ *Westmount News*, Vol. 1, No. 16, January 18, 1908. Elizabeth Hanson questions the extent of Lighthall's involvement in the library building campaign in *A Jewel in the Park: Westmount Public Library, 1897-1918*, (Montreal: Véhicule Press, 1997).

¹⁷ “The History of Westmount's Mayors,” unpub. pamphlet, Westmount Library, Westmount, Quebec, p. 9.

¹⁸ During Lighthall's term as mayor of Westmount, the Montreal Light, Heat and Power Company obtained from the Quebec legislature a charter giving it the power to tear up streets and install poles and wires along any street or highway within a 100 mile radius of the City of Montreal. Lighthall managed to have the charter rescinded with the support of enraged Westmount property owners.

An expression of the kind of power Lighthall wielded is found in a letter sent in 1913 to Prime Minister Borden giving him advice on “Hindu immigration” and the government policy to exclude immigrants coming from India. “As you are aware, I take an interest in several of our public questions, and whenever I can help in any solution, I try to do so.”¹⁹ To a contemporary reader formed by the twentieth century’s obsession with specialization, the source of his expertise appears dubious. Lighthall qualified his remarks with the admission that he knew he was taking a liberty by sending advice to the prime minister, but nevertheless enclosed his “possibly two or three conclusions [which he thought] may be of use in the present.”²⁰ Judging by the tone and promptness of Borden’s reply written the following day, the suggestions were given careful consideration and Lighthall was encouraged to continue in this role as unofficial advisor. David McCord’s opinions, on the other hand, were not so well received. At the end of the Boer War, McCord wrote Lord Minto offering his services for the writing of a new constitution for South Africa. He was quietly rebuffed.²¹

Considered from a historical perspective, what is striking about John Samuel McCord and William Douw Lighthall is the culminating effect they had on David McCord’s life work – the founding of a national history museum in his name. With the death of John Samuel and other close family members, McCord was left with the financial means and *raison d’être* to pursue his passion for commemoration. Lighthall’s contribution to McCord’s dream, though less dramatic, was no less significant. In the decade leading up to McGill University’s acceptance of McCord’s donation of his collection and the opening of the museum in 1921, Lighthall played a pivotal role, second only to McCord himself, in establishing the institution which would maintain and display the collection.²² It was Lighthall’s sustained interest and vigorous intervention, along with that of McGill’s chief librarian Charles Gould that eventually convinced the university’s Board of Governors to accept the conditions of McCord’s donation. When McCord’s mental health was such that he could no longer manage his own

¹⁹ NAC, Lighthall Papers, MG29093, Vol. I, File #25, Correspondence, December 12, 1913.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ MCFP, Vol. 101-0/113, 1-3, David Ross McCord to Lord Minto, December 30, 1899.

affairs, it was Lighthall who took charge to safeguard the McCord inheritance so that the museum would be guaranteed a source of funding after the founder's death.

These were trying years for McCord, filled as they were with anxiety over his own state of health and intense frustration and disappointment at McGill's reluctance to accept his donation. Despairing that the situation would change in his lifetime, McCord turned to his friend Lighthall for support. "I thank you for coming in. You are my mainstay. I had not (except to church) been off the place for months."²³ McCord wrote to Lighthall, who by this time had become his confident and witness to his principal hopes and fears: "I am not well – do not know whether I will mend fast or get worse. Say nothing about it as I do not want inquiries."²⁴ Ten days later, in a state of recovery and in a more buoyant mood, he sent this letter:

Dear Tek. I have been pretty anxious about my bladder. Symptoms at one time pointed to geology – (I would rather study boulders not so personally) & long knives – now we Iroquois – hate 'long knives' & interesting operations do not appeal to us of the long robe – if not long knife. Thank God I am better – but very delicate. Now the bladder is a somewhat essential part of the human anatomy. Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy* is a treasure of wit & learning. A leg or an arm may be parted with for a passion & glory! but the chief custodian of human aquatics – no!²⁵

While McCord boasted to Lighthall of his increased mental powers, he also conceded that, "this youthful spirit of mine is imprisoned in an old-ish body & I forget it."²⁶ His handwriting, syntax, and the content of his letters, even the McCord signature, bespeak a man whose personality had already begun to unravel.

²² Richard Virr, mentions the collaboration between Lighthall and McCord.

²³ NAC, Lighthall Papers, MG29D93, McCord correspondence, file #28, June 21, 1913, DRM to LDW. Punctuation and emphasis in the original.

²⁴ Ibid. Punctuation and emphasis in the original.

²⁵ NAC, Lighthall Papers, MG29D93, McCord correspondence, file #28, December 13 and December 23, 1909. Punctuation and emphasis in the original. *Anatomy of Melancholy* was first published by Robert Burton in 1632. A New York Review of Books edition, intro. William H. Gass, was published in 2001.

²⁶ MCFP, file #2049, Lighthall correspondence, DRM to WDL, December 4, 1909.

What attracted Lighthall to the older McCord is more difficult to fathom. In the letters they exchanged between 1909 and 1921, Lighthall comes across as the more stable and personable of the two. McCord needed Lighthall to help get his museum off the ground, but what Lighthall gained from the friendship is less clear. Lighthall's motivation is, nonetheless, hinted at in two articles that appeared in the *Montreal Herald* in 1909. In one instance, he addressed the Montreal Women's Club on early Canadian history and used the opportunity to sell his audience on the merits of a project dear to his heart, the foundation of a museum of Indian archaeology which would "pay tribute to the virtues of the Indian."²⁷ It seems in 1909 both men had museums on their minds.

Their shared pursuits were most apparent when they were surrounded by objects from their own collections. Both men were avid collectors of Canadiana with a special interest in Native artifacts and they used these objects as props for their storytelling. In one lecture given before the female branch of the Antiquarian and Numismatic Society, Lighthall used an 'Indian' clay pipe, allegedly belonging to a Hochelagan man who was among those who greeted Jacques Cartier upon his arrival on the island of Montreal, as his point of departure for his version of how Canada began.²⁸ David McCord, who was also thoroughly at home in his storyteller persona, was never happier than when guiding visitors through his 'Indian' museum on Côte-des-Neiges Road. 'Playing Indian' was a popular pastime among middle-class men and boys in North America and Britain.²⁹ Learning 'to live like Indians during the camping season' in children's summer camps in twentieth-century Ontario, was, according to Canadian historian Sharon Wall, an important rite of passage, at least in central Canada.³⁰

When and where they first met is unknown. Lighthall's habit of addressing his letters to McCord with a drawing of a Maltese Cross, the symbol of the

²⁷ *Montreal Herald*, March 20, 1909, p. 2.

²⁸ *Montreal Herald*, October 28, 1909, p. 5. Lighthall's novel, *The Master of Life: A Romance of the Five Nations and Prehistoric Montreal* (Toronto: Musson, 1908), was staged as a play for tourists at Lake Champlain in the summer of the same year.

²⁹ See Philip Deloria, *Playing Indian* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1998) and Sharon Wall, "Totem Poles, Teepees, and Token Traditions: 'Playing Indian' at Ontario Summer Camps, 1920-1955," *Canadian Historical Review*, Vol. 86, No. 3, September 2005, pp. 513-544.

Knights Templar, would suggest the Freemasons.³¹ David McCord joined St. John's Lodge, where his father had been master, at the beginning of the 1870s. A certificate of membership attesting to the degree he obtained, dates his participation from 1873, but other objects in the McCord collection would suggest an earlier date.³² The central activity of the Masonic lodges was the enactment of elaborate initiation rituals.³³ In the last third of the nineteenth century, male-only fraternities where middle-class men gathered to dress up in costumes and re-enact rituals inspired by 'primitive societies' were popular across North America. Mark Carnes offers a few explanations for why so many men were smitten by ritual. One explanation is the stifling gender and class prescriptions that severely restricted the range of behaviour permitted to Victorian, middle-class men. Another he found in the work of cultural anthropologist John Whiting, who saw male ritual as an attempt to resolve 'cross-sex identity conflict'.³⁴

Part of the McCord-Lighthall friendship involved 'playing Indian' together. Was this a carry-over from a shared Masonic practice? It did seem to impart a sense of shared vision and an 'us against them' attitude – 'redskins against the pale faces' with McGill University assuming the role of the 'palefaces' – common to the initiated. Both men illustrated their letters to each other with pictures of tomahawks and headdresses. Lighthall was known as Tek, short for Tekenderoken, and McCord, Rononshonni after his honorary Mohawk name. Writing to a McGill administrator who was given one of their letters to read, Lighthall felt compelled to explain what the symbols meant.

³⁰ Sharon Wall, "Totem Poles, Teepees, and Token Traditions: 'Playing Indian' at Ontario Summer Camps, 1920-1955," p. 514.

³¹ For a history of the Freemasons in Quebec see A.J.B. Milborne, *One Hundred Years of Freemasonry in the Province of Quebec* (Montreal: no publisher, no date).

³² M12345, I001-M/0-1998a, "Membership certificate in St. John's Lodge. Other articles related to DRM's participation in Freemasonry in Quebec include certificates of: #12206 "3rd degree mason" (1872); #12208 "Royal Arch Mason;" #12210 "Certificate of Sublime;" #1874 "Prince of the Royal Secret;" #12345 "Membership in Society of Knights of Templar of Saint John Jerusalem;" #12212 "Masonic order certificate as Excellent and Perfect Prince Rose Croix of HRDM" (1873) and #12235 "St. Paul's Lodge Grand and Royal Conclave of Knights Templar, May 16, 1872."

³³ Mark Carnes, "Middle-Class Men and the Solace of Fraternal Ritual," in *Meanings For Manhood*, ed. Mark Carnes and Clyde Griffen (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), p. 39.

³⁴ *Ibid*, pp.47-48.

Enclosed is McCord's letter to me. The whimsical Maltese Cross signature is the "Templar's" sign, (which I apply to him. "Tek' is his reference to my honorary Iroquois chiefship as "Ticonderoga" Tekenderoken). I mention these things so that you will not think the letter crazy.³⁵

According to Sharon Wall, "'going native' had little to do with honouring (or even accurately portraying) Aboriginal tradition, but much to do with seeking a balm for the non-Native experience of modernity."³⁶ Donald Wright, who has written about the McCord/Lighthall friendship at some length, argues similarly. For Wright, the use of private names was a sign of involvement in a much larger political and social project identified with imperialism. "Lighthall and McCord afford an opportunity to rethink imperialism as, in part, a process of resistance to, and accommodation with, modernity."³⁷

Their form of address for each other may have been unusual, but theirs was an intense, old-fashioned relationship. For example, they never used their first names when writing to each other. During the darkest days of McCord's internment in Homewood Sanatorium where he spent the last decade of his life, mentally and physically ill, David McCord still held fast to his friendship with Lighthall. He did so despite his wife's objections and signs that Lighthall served his own interests with regard to the McCord estate better than he served his friend's. In the years of their greatest collaborative effort, when letters and postcards flew between them almost on a daily basis, the tone was of mutual respect, affection, and in McCord's case, something resembling admiration. On at least one occasion he affectionately addressed Lighthall as "Dear Sweet to the sweets." On another occasion he wrote: "It is charming the amount of good you do! I saw a beautiful letter of yours in a chance issue of the 'McGill News': 'Architecture re: with our united kind'.³⁸ In New Year's greetings to Lighthall, sent on the eve of 1911, he writes: "To you as one of the most useful men in Canada. Let me wish you a very happy New Year for yourself and your many

³⁵ MCFP, file #2049, Lighthall correspondence, WDL to Fleet, March 24, 1913.

³⁶ Sharon Wall, p. 514.

³⁷ Donald Wright, "W.D. Lighthall and David Ross McCord: Antimodernism and English-Canadian Imperialism, 1880s-1918," *Journal of Canadian Studies*, Vol. 32, No. 2, Summer 1997, p. 135.

schemes of utility.”³⁹ Congratulations freely given, however, sometimes betrayed a touch of envy for the public recognition that eluded the older McCord, but seemed to come so easily to his friend.

My congratulations on your beautiful speech. You are incurring _____ the seigneur hereof. A grave responsibility. It may cost you a fare to Toronto perhaps! ‘there comes a time in the life of every man when his life-work was given the appreciation which it deserved’!⁴⁰

It is not difficult to imagine Lighthall acting the part of McCord’s alter ego, playing the worldly man of action to David McCord’s reclusive eccentric. A hint of how Lighthall saw himself is found in a letter he wrote as an executive member of the Cartier Monument Committee to George Hill, the sculptor hired to design the figures for the Cartier monument.

My own views, which are not official, but simply private, to you, are that in the complete figure, he [Cartier] ought to be represented, as a man not of rounded muscles, but rather crisp outline, giving an impression of nervous power and activity.⁴¹

There is more than a touch of the autobiographical in his suggestions. David McCord, in contrast, preferred a more scholarly pose. In all of the photos from this period of museum building, David Ross McCord is portrayed as the round shouldered scholar surrounded by the tools of his trade, his desk, library, reading glasses.⁴² This difference in presentation may have something to do with the disparity in their ages – McCord was the elder by thirteen years – but it was also fundamental to how they perceived themselves and how they wanted others to view them.

III

In his uncompleted “History of the McCord Museum,” Lighthall traced the beginnings of the McCord National Museum to a conversation he had with David

³⁸ NAC, Lighthall Papers, MG29D93, McCord correspondence, File #28, May 15, 1909; second letter undated.

³⁹ Ibid, December 29, 1910.

⁴⁰ Ibid, June 16, 1911.

⁴¹ NAC, Lighthall Papers, MG29093, Vol. I, file #25, correspondence, November 13, 1913.

⁴² See Chapter 4, figure 10, p. 168, David Ross McCord in his library, “Temple Grove,” Montreal, 1916 (MP 2135-1N).

McCord in the spring of 1908 at his Place d'Armes law office. According to Lighthall, McCord had paid him a visit to discuss the possibility of donating his collection of Canadiana to the public. A recent brush with mortality had put McCord in a self-reflective mood and he spoke of his desire to create a national museum of Canadian history, the nucleus of which would come from his own collection. McCord had suffered a stroke some months before and according to Lighthall it had "opened his eyes to the other world," and made him realize, "he had hitherto been self-centred in enjoyment of his treasures."⁴³ The idea of creating a museum with his collection was not a new one; a private museum had existed at Temple Grove for over a decade. But what had changed, according to Lighthall, was McCord's willingness to share his treasures with the public.

McCord was no stranger to private museums. As a child he had visited the private collection of Dr. Edward Van Cortlandt in the company of his father. John Samuel and Van Cortlandt had met as students at Rev. Wilkie's school in Quebec City. A surgeon by training, Van Cortlandt was also drawn to other aspects of science, especially geology and archaeology. "In 1843, when workmen building the Union Bridge came upon an Indian burial site on the Ottawa River, he carried out searches, collecting artifacts, and recorded his work in a report which appeared in 1853 in the *Canadian Journal*."⁴⁴ Victorian science was the providence of amateurs, gentlemen-scholars like McCord and Cortlandt who possessed sufficient amounts of leisure time to dedicate to their particular branch of science.⁴⁵ Private collections formed an important component of pre-Darwinian science's approach to the creation of knowledge. With the advent of the laboratory and new methods of scientific research, the private collection became something of an anachronism. Susan Sheets Pyenson writes: "The onset of the era of 'big science' meant typically that scientific activity began to involve teamwork,

⁴³ MCFP, file #2049, correspondence, "Origin of the David McCord National Museum of McGill University," 1908.

⁴⁴ See "Edward Van Cortlandt," by Courtney Bond, *Canadian Dictionary of Biography*, Vol. X, 1871-1880.

⁴⁵ See Philippa Levine, *The Amateur and the Professional: Antiquarians, Historians and Archaeologists in Victorian England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

elaborate technology, and massive government expenditure,” all of which was outside the scope of colonial natural history museums.⁴⁶

McCord's age and the state of his health brought a new urgency to his plans concerning the future of his collection. In the spring of 1908 McCord had just turned sixty-four, the same age as his father when he died in 1865. Thoughts of his own mortality and legacy were on his mind when he penned the following letter:

As most people are aware I possess a National Museum of priceless value. I have nothing that the British Museum would not be glad to possess.... I have kept a Western University, who are ready with a fire proof building & all expenses defrayed waiting all these years. The matter is critical. It would be a most regrettable matter & a slur on the metropolis of Canada, if I be banished from it. I possess, so to speak not only the heart of Canadian history but I have the rarest objects – links of Empire. At my time of life - delays are dangerous. No one could assemble my vast quantity of material & put it in order save he who has created it.⁴⁷

Between 1906 and 1907, David McCord began to read through his father's diaries making annotations as he went. Penciled in were comments on events his father had described. In one of his jottings, David expresses concern about how John Samuel McCord was to be remembered.

My father was one of the best of men. No statement of mine is required in proof of such. There is such a wonderful humility in many of his prayers that I am constrained to enter this remark as a stranger might form an erroneous opinion of his high character. Perhaps devout aspirations take different forms in different generations. Note throughout these diaries how he lived spiritually on the Holy Communion.⁴⁸

Was David's anxiety about his father's reputation a reflection of his own preoccupation with how he would be remembered? David McCord's father and his paternal and maternal grandfathers all had enjoyed highly successful careers as ministers of the Crown. David McCord never achieved the same degree of public approbation and time was running out. David McCord's marriage was childless. Our children “would have been thoroughbreds,” he reportedly said, “but

⁴⁶ Susan Sheets-Pyenson, *Cathedrals of Science: the Development of Colonial Natural History Museums during the Late Nineteenth Century* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1988), p. 98.

⁴⁷ MCFP, file #2051, “Donation of Museum to McGill University, 1908-1919.”

God knows best.”⁴⁹ Given his childlessness, and that of his other brother and sisters, how could he carry on the McCord name when his death would mark the last of the McCord family from this line? Who would do the remembering then?

McCord had another compelling reason for wanting to share his collection with the public – the cost. McCord had already exhausted his inheritance on the project. Income from his law practice and revenues from rental properties acquired in exchange for parcels of land belonging to Temple Grove paid for his lifestyle as a gentleman-scholar and collector, but it was never enough.⁵⁰ To meet the spiralling expenses associated with his collecting habit, McCord mortgaged his properties, a practice that pushed him close to insolvency. He also borrowed thousands of dollars from his sisters. At one time an enthusiastic supporter of the museum, Annie McCord changed her mind near the end of her life. She felt it had exacted too high a price from her family. Months before her death she was quoted by her cousin Arthur Tylee as saying: “Miss Annie told me not to worry about any pension as she had made a provision for me. I didn’t ask what? but she did tell me of certain legacies and laughingly said ‘I am not leaving the McCord Museum any money – so there will be a little more for you...’.”⁵¹ According to W. D. Lighthall, who took over the management of the McCord estate in 1923, “David always ran his Estate on debts and borrowed money, and the position was so threatening when we took it over from himself that it was practically insolvent, and a very slight attack by any one of his creditors would have precipitated it into the gulf.”⁵² McCord had the means to support a small collection, but he knew if he wanted to expand it into something resembling a national collection, he would need public support. He could choose to use his money to continue collecting or to build a museum; he couldn’t afford both. First and foremost a collector – his greatest pleasure came from the objects themselves – he chose the first option and

⁴⁸ MCFP, file #416, John Samuel McCord’s diary, August 11, 1859.

⁴⁹ MCFP, “W.D. Lighthall, Museum Matters, 1935-50,” newspaper clipping, *Gazette*, June 8, 1936.

⁵⁰ Don Fyson, “Rich Man, Poor Man, Beggar Man... Thief? Four Generations of McCord Family Wealth, 1760-1930,” unpublished paper, Montreal 1991.

⁵¹ MCFP, file # 1214, Miss Anne McCord estate, Arthur Tylee to W.D. Lighthall, 1929.

⁵² MFCF, file #1214, WDL to Arthur Tyler, no date.

proceeded to explore the possibility of finding funds elsewhere to cover the costs of his museum building project.

McCord's desire to create a public museum from his collection was also affected by developments in the collecting world. To England, where McCord looked for leadership in such matters, individuals like Pitt Rivers had begun a trend that saw private collectors donating their collections to institutions who opened them to the public. "While American museums such as the Charleston Museum (c. 1773) and Peale's Museum in Philadelphia (1782) had always catered to the public, British museums had historically been more private," writes historian Brian Young.⁵³ At the time when McCord was busy documenting the disappearing scenes of British colonial life in Lower Canada, cultural reformers like Sir Henry Cole, director of the South Kensington Museum, and John Ruskin, were already advocating for public museums as places of popular education. In a passage from Sir Henry Cole's collected writings he highlights the potential benefits of museum attendance for the working-man.

If you wish to vanquish Drunkenness and the Devil, make God's day of rest elevating and refining to the working man; don't leave him to find his recreation in bed first, and in the public house afterwards; attract him to church or chapel by the earnest and persuasive eloquence of the preacher, restrained with reasonable limits; ...open all museums of Science and Art after the hours of Divine service; let the working man get his refreshment there in company with his wife and children, rather than leave him to booze away from them in the Public house and Gin Place. The Museum will certainly lead him to wisdom and gentleness, and to Heaven, whilst the latter will lead him to brutality and perdition.⁵⁴

Just as the creation of public parks was aimed at improving 'man's' physical health, the museum was thought to be an instrument for improving man's inner life.

In this period, many reformers, McCord included, believed in the panacea of public culture as a means to improve the quality of life in urban centres. Helen Meller, in her study of the late Victorian city in England, argues that this idea

⁵³ Brian Young, *The Making and Unmaking of a University Museum*, (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's Press, 2000), p. 41.

achieved its widest audience in the 1880s. "Under the influence of theories of social evolution, the idea of trying to raise the level of civilization as a way of solving the 'social question' struck a deep chord of response."⁵⁵ The belief in culture as a civilizing force provided the stimulus for building libraries, museums, and art galleries, (the three were often combined in the same space) throughout the English-speaking world. McCord adopted a similar rationale for selling his museum project: "One of the differences between English people and the denizens of this country is the lack of knowledge caused largely by the absence of museums. There is no lack of ability in Canadians, but their opportunities for higher education have been dwarfed, and I have done all that lay in my power to meet a want."⁵⁶ In the ambitions of the Mechanics Institutes and in the adoption of the public library acts,⁵⁷ was found a desire to not only disseminate new, useful knowledge to the working class, but to also teach this group the lessons of liberal political economy.⁵⁸

Government involvement in the creation of public museums spoke to what Tony Bennett, *In the Birth of the Museum*, describes as "new strategies of governing aimed at producing a citizenry which, rather than needing to be externally and coercively directed, would increasingly monitor and regulate its own conduct."⁵⁹ Founded in 1857, London's South Kensington Museum, later the Victoria and Albert Museum, was one of this new breed of public institution. Considered a model of the new museology because of its free admissions policy and late evening opening hours, the South Kensington combined education and popular entertainment as a means to increasing the general standards of education among skilled labourers and artisans. "The museum aimed to instil a culture of

⁵⁴ Sir Henry Cole, *Fifty Years of Public Work of Sir Henry Cole, K.C.B., Accounted for in his Deeds, Speeches and Writings* (2 Vols.), quoted in Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics* (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 21.

⁵⁵ Helen Meller, *Leisure and the Changing City, 1870-1914* (London; Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1976), pp. 14-15.

⁵⁶ MCFP, file #2055, "Museum Correspondence," DRM to Mrs. W.C. Hodgson, Regent of the Daughters of the Empire, September 15, 1919.

⁵⁷ In 1890 the provincial government of Honoré Mercier passed a law which gave municipalities the right to establish and maintain libraries for the public.

⁵⁸ R.J. Morris, "The Middle Class and British Towns and Cities of the Industrial Revolution, 1780-1870," in *The Pursuit of Urban History*, ed. Derek Fraser and Anthony Sutcliffe, (London: Arnold, 1983), p. 303.

self-education and self-help into the artisan community and to improve the profitability and competitiveness of industry by doing so," writes Tim Barringer.⁶⁰ Henry Cole, the first director, paid lip service to the idea of the museum as 'a school-room for everyone', but the main priority remained the promotion of good design among producers and consumers. In an effort to improve the overall quality of design in Britain, adjacent to the museum was installed an art school and the offices of the Department of Science and Art, a government agency which controlled art and design education throughout Britain.

Closer to home, McCord had hoped to tailor his museum project to fit the South Kensington model. In 1919, following McGill's acceptance of his collection, he wrote, "I am putting into the Museum my family china and mahogany except what little Mrs. McCord and I shall require in what must now be the short period we can expect to remain on earth. I do this in order to give an example to others. I want to see a Canadian South Kensington. We are far behind England and also far behind the United States."⁶¹ Inspired by South Kensington's ambitious mandate, McCord, too, envisioned the creation of a school "of the useful and ornamental arts based on types of native industry, such as the manufacture of wall paper, works in metal of all kinds, and ceramic work – domestic and ornamental."⁶² Central to South Kensington's project was the use of non-western objects as examples of good design, and in this McCord concurred. Although he had none of the imperial spoils which lent such an exotic air to the exhibition spaces at the South Kensington to draw upon, McCord's use of Native objects served a similar purpose. Demonstrating a Ruskinian rejection of industrialization, McCord, turned to handmade Native crafts as symbols of a pre-industrial world, of which he lamented the loss.

⁵⁹ Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum*, p. 8.

⁶⁰ Tim Barringer, "The South Kensington Museum and the colonial project," in *Colonialism and the Object*, ed. Tom Barringer and Tom Flynn (London & New York: Routledge, 1998), p. 13.

⁶¹ MCFP, file #2055, "Museum Correspondence," DRM to Mrs. W.C. Hodgson, Regent of the Daughters of the Empire, September 15, 1919.

⁶² MCFP, file #2055, "Museum Correspondence," DRM to unknown recipient, February, 1920.

IV

The first decade of the twentieth century was a propitious time for creating new public institutions in Canada. The federal government had committed itself to building a museum in the nation's capital to house what had been the Geological Survey and provision had already been made for a national archives.⁶³ McCord's interest in history museums also coincided with what historian Alan Gordon describes as a 'heritage boom' in Montreal.⁶⁴ From the 1870s, until the beginning of the new century, Montreal's population more than doubled. In the process the city's built environment underwent significant transformations. New residential areas were quickly added to accommodate the growing population, but in the older sections of the city, street-widening and new buildings threatened the integrity of the original cityscape.⁶⁵ It was McCord's urge to 'save the landmarks' in the 1880s with his Bunnett commissions, which partly accounts for his passionate interest in history museums later on. McCord was a member of a loosely knit circle that included Lighthall and other, mostly middle-class professionals, both English and French speaking, who saw in the destruction of Montreal's historical buildings an attack on the values and mores of an earlier time.⁶⁶

The McCord National History Museum was in part David McCord's response to what he perceived as the underdeveloped state of English culture in Montreal, and Canada generally. The country's material achievements were many, but culturally he feared it was as much a backwater as her American neighbour to the south.

French Canadian Letters While undoubtedly a national feeling a *contrahistorique* from that of a conquered race, fosters a national literature and that the French Canadians have been cultivating a French National feeling in Canada – so to speak the young Canada idea – I am disposed to

⁶³ See Archie Key, *Beyond Four Walls: The Origins and Development of Canadian Museums* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1977). Also Hervé Gagnon, "L'évolution des musées accessibles au public à Montréal au XIXe siècle. Capitalisme culturel et représentations idéologiques." Ph.D. History, Université de Montréal, 1995.

⁶⁴ See Alan Gordon's *Making Public Pasts* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001), p. 32-33.

⁶⁵ See Jean-Claude Robert, *Atlas historique de Montréal* (Montréal: Libre Expression, 1994).

⁶⁶ For more on Montreal's heritage movement at the turn of the century, see Alan Gordon *Making Public Pasts*, pp. 49-71.

think that it was rather the bend of their minds in their colleges that has produced among them a literature in French earlier than we have produced one in English – On leaving college their habit of mind is less practical than ours – we seek to make money as the first essential. This has made the country. It had not produced English literature in Canada – A change is now being made manifest in that direction. The Canadians have always lived on less than we have, and independent of being less business like as a race, this need of less has tended to find time for letters, but on the other hand since the rebellions, controlling Lower Canada the leaders have had the good sense to find offices shelter positions for their literary markmen(sic). I suspect that under the same circumstances the English in Lower Canada would have written as much. But has no upper province shown this, where the English have had the patronage? Examine this phase of the question. Is there not in the young Frenchmen leaving college a practical sympathy for letters which youthful English man, if he have keeps in the background, subordinate to the desire to advance himself in the world. But we must not forget the mere handful of English in the Province from the beginning and how few of this handful even had the same advantage of a college training that has been given to the far greater numbers of French Canadians. We might have left college with the same love of letters, had we ever been in College and when I think what this handful has done, under Providence I am amazed. how peculiar was the position of the bureaucratic Frenchman associating with the new English ruler – and at the same time in so limited a measure really sympathizing with him. I suspect. I suspect they did it on the common ground of gentlemen and the bond it produced. How far have we really made English of the French and how far was it intelligent and expected as possible that we should. As after the Norman Conquest in England no bar of religion to the fusion.⁶⁷

For someone like McCord, who strongly endorsed the merits of a classical education, literature and culture more generally, were what distinguished great nations from the lesser powers.⁶⁸

Across North America, municipal governments were busy building new infrastructures to meet the needs of their exploding populations. At the turn of the century, Montreal lagged behind cities such as Toronto in the building of non-sectarian, publicly funded cultural institutions. Montreal's city fathers tended to take a pragmatic approach when it came to spending taxpayers' money on new city infrastructure. Montrealers could take pride in the aqueduct, sidewalks, and

⁶⁷ MCFP, file #2024, "Historical Notebooks Vol. III," p. 94. Punctuation and emphasis in the original.

⁶⁸ Ibid, "Notes on a classical education," p. 35.

electrification projects, but libraries and museums were not something municipal government considered a priority.

Municipal administrators in Montreal also had to contend with a city whose social map contained deep cleavages resulting from the historic co-habitation of Canadians of French and English origins, overlaid with class and ethnic divisions.⁶⁹ The existence of two dominant religious groups had begat a dual set of public institutions, one for Roman Catholics and the other for Protestants. The benefits of this confessional practice, which dated from the beginning of the nineteenth century, were summed up by Archbishop Bruchési in a letter to the mayor of Montreal and city council;

Nous avons à Montréal deux sociétés distinctes, la société catholique et la société non catholique.... avons nos écoles, nos asiles de charité, nos orphelinats; les protestants ont les leurs... et c'est là que se trouve le secret de la paix qui règne à Montréal. Il y a certains terrains sur lesquels la fusion n'est pas possible.⁷⁰

Bruchési's letter, written in the winter of 1901 was a small sample of his voluminous contribution to the debate raging over whether the city of Montreal should build a public library for its citizens. Mayor Préfontaine and some of his councillors had taken what the Catholic Church considered to be an alarming step on the slippery slope to secularization, with their proposed plan to build a municipal library open to all no matter their creed.

While there were other initiatives dating as far back as 1880, the timing of the municipal library initiative was conditioned by a string of events and featured the ambitious urban plans of Montreal Mayor Raymond Préfontaine and the philanthropy of millionaire Andrew Carnegie.⁷¹ First elected mayor in 1898, Préfontaine was concerned with the modest face Montreal presented to the international community. In the city's metamorphosis from colonial outpost to Canada's metropolis, Montreal had failed to take on 'the look' of a world-class

⁶⁹ See Yvan Lamonde, "Social Origins of the Public Library in Montreal," *Canadian Library Journal*, Vol. 38, No. 6, December 1981, pp. 363-370.

⁷⁰ Letter from Mgr Bruchési to mayor of Montreal and councillors, March 6, 1901, quoted in Michèle Dagenais, "Vie culturelle et pouvoirs publics locaux. La fondation de la bibliothèque municipale de Montréal," *Urban History Review/Revue d'histoire urbaine*, Vol. XXVI, No. 2, (1996), p. 42.

⁷¹ C.V. Marsolais et al., *Histoire des maires de Montréal* (Montréal: VLB, 1993), pp. 172-177.

city. Missing were the examples of monumental architecture, the grand boulevards, and the imposing public spaces that indicated its place as the nation's most important commercial centre.⁷² The construction of municipally-funded, classically-inspired buildings served the dual purpose of creating a public infrastructure to provide services while raising the standard of architecture in the city itself.

Talk of libraries was also in the air in 1900. Montreal played the host to the Third Annual International Library Conference at McGill University. The main organizer was Charles Gould, McGill's head librarian and in the years to come one of McCord's principal allies in his effort to have McGill University sponsor his museum.⁷³ At the previous International Library Conference held in London in 1897, Gould had spoken out against the "the comparatively unsatisfactory position of libraries in Montreal today."⁷⁴ There were others in Montreal, who, although less directly involved with the work of libraries, also shared Gould's opinion. McCord was among those invited to attend the conference, although there is no record of whether he did so. Both French- and English-speaking Montrealers felt that the absence of a municipal library reflected badly on their city's reputation as Canada's commercial metropolis. Westmount, a small garden suburb adjacent to Montreal, had already taken the lead over her much larger neighbour by opening its own municipal library the previous year – the first public library of its kind in Quebec. In Ontario, however, public libraries were springing up all over the province, in communities large and small, thanks to the *largesse* of American steel-maker Andrew Carnegie. Between 1901 and 1917, Carnegie funded one hundred and eleven building grants in Ontario, effectively establishing a network of public libraries in that province which persists to this day.⁷⁵

⁷² Anthony Sutcliffe, "Montréal, une métropole," p. 23.

⁷³ Charles Gould (1855-1919) was born in Montreal and graduated from McGill University with an honours B.A. in classics. In 1893 he became McGill's librarian and in 1904 founded McGill School of Library Science. In 1908 he was the Vice President of the American Library Association. See *Prominent People of the Province of Quebec, 1923-24* (Montreal: The Biographical Society of Canada Ltd., 1924), p. 461.

⁷⁴ Elizabeth Hanson, *A Jewel in a Park*, p. 25.

⁷⁵ *Ibid*, p. 16.

In North America and Britain, the Carnegie name was synonymous with public libraries. Andrew Carnegie had made his millions in steel manufacturing in the United States after being forced to emigrate with his family from their native Scotland following the persecution of his father for his Chartist views. Carnegie's international reputation as a library philanthropist made him an obvious source for funds to build a municipal library in Montreal. In the year following the Montreal conference, with enthusiasm for public libraries still running high, Mayor Préfontaine persuaded the Carnegie foundation to pledge \$150,000 for a library, open to the public at no charge, to be run by the City of Montreal.

When the announcement came, it caused a small furore. Quebec, divided as it was along religious and linguistic lines, had evolved two distinct library traditions which made for a very different situation from the one found in Ontario. Compared to its Protestant counterparts, the Catholic Church played a more decisive role in determining the cultural preferences of its adherents. Catholic readers were allowed a very limited selection of literature comprised mostly of technical materials and religious books that did not appear on the Church's Index. For the Catholic hierarchy, the opening of a public library was another example of the growing encroachment by modern secular forces on what they considered to be spiritual terrain. It was their opposition that finally derailed the plan and as a result the money was never spent, much to the horror of liberals both Catholic and Protestant.

In the failure of the city's library proposal, however, McCord saw new hope for his museum. He wrote in a letter to Andrew Carnegie, "You were good enough once to wish to establish a public library in Montreal. Our mixed population caused the scheme to be abandoned and it was for the best."⁷⁶ Always alert to the possibilities generated by influential connections, McCord went on to link his project to the city's successful bid to receive Carnegie funding, while in the same breath tactfully explaining why his museum would succeed where the library had failed. "Such a scheme would be National and appeal to our divided

⁷⁶ MCFP, file #2048, Museum correspondence, DRM to Andrew Carnegie, January 11, 1906.

population, and be carrying out in another form your previous intentions of kindly doing something for us.”⁷⁷

Whether Lighthall was aware of it or not, McCord had been seeking support for his idea of creating a public museum with his collection at least as early as 1903.”⁷⁸ A letter addressed to Canadian Prime Minister Sir Wilfrid Laurier confirms McCord’s interest in a plan to have the Dominion government provide a house for his collection in Ottawa. McCord had known the prime minister at McGill and during the years following graduation when Laurier had made his home in Arthabaskaville, Quebec. As young lawyers they had consulted on some of the same legal cases. In his reply, Laurier thanked McCord for his generous offer, but was sorry he could not accommodate him: “We have no suitable building at this moment, but we are just acquiring the ground for a large museum, which we hope to build early next spring. In the meantime, I shall be glad to see you any time, either here or in Montreal.”⁷⁹

Laurier was being overly optimistic, however, when he suggested that the construction of the National Museum was imminent. The building, when it was completed in 1911, was designed to house the collection of the Geological Survey. But ultimately it had little bearing on McCord’s plans. The arrangement proposed by Laurier was contingent on the McCord collection becoming Dominion government property for display in the National Gallery of Canada. McCord’s position, from which he never wavered, was that his collection was neither for sale nor to be presented in a museum other than one which bore the McCord name. Another drawback to the Dominion plan, according to McCord, was that Ottawa was not a large enough centre from which to teach.⁸⁰ McCord, however, remained interested in this option for at least another year. In 1904, he wrote to his friend J.B. MacLean, president of MacLean’s Newspapers, asking him to use his influence with Colonel Thompson, the Liberal Party Whip and

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ In 1900 McCord received a reply from the secretary of the Commissionaire des Travaux Publics acknowledging his offer to sell his “propriété antique” to McGill’s “école normale.” MCFP, file #2048, letter from the Secretary of Public Works, Quebec, October 20, 1900.

⁷⁹ NAC, Laurier Papers, MG26G, Reel C805, Vol. 287, October 21, 1903.

⁸⁰ MCFP, file #2048, “Draft Suggestions to Westmount,” no date.

editor of the *Military Gazette*, who MacLean assured McCord was an enthusiastic militia man, member of an old United Empire Loyalist family, and wielded power “in this and other matters at Ottawa.”⁸¹ It is interesting to note that here, as elsewhere, political party rivalries never seemed to seriously infringe upon support for the museum. Being a member of an “old United Empire Loyalist family,” it appears, transcended political differences, even as deeply held as McCord’s, who for many years was secretary of the provincial Liberal-Conservative Association.

Three years later, McCord pitched a more elaborate plan to Andrew Carnegie involving the construction of a Greek temple on land belonging to McCord adjacent to his residence, Temple Grove. Perched on the side of Mount Royal, overlooking “the river of Canada as the Great Temple overlooks the blue Danube,” the McCord National History Museum was to be Canada’s Valhalla.⁸² Here it would fulfill its special mission, “keeping immortal names before the youth, before the old, always in the roll-call of the Empire.”⁸³ McCord explained his choice of a Greek Temple couched in terms meant to emphasize the educational merit of the project, “I mentioned a Greek temple, because in a new country no form of building would be at the same time as fine a lesson in architecture and afford as much wall space....”⁸⁴

In McCord’s symbolic universe and that of other classically educated Victorian gentlemen, Greek architecture was considered the pinnacle of built perfection, the ideal reconciliation of form with function.⁸⁵ In a new country such as Canada with few physical reminders of its past, the use of an Ancient Greek temple for a history museum was one way to impart an instant and impressive lineage to this new undertaking. Architectural historian Spiro Kostof has described Grecian revival architecture in the United States as being a:

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² The Valhalla that inspired McCord was designed in Greek revival style for Ludwig of Bavaria. Commissioned in 1816 but not completed until 1842, this marble clad, cast-iron roofed Parthenon was built on a hill near Regensburg, Germany, overlooking the Danube. Michael Raeburn, ed. *Architecture of the Western World* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold 1980), pp. 108-09.

⁸³ MCFP, file #2026, Canadian Notebooks, Vol. V, p. 1.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

happy vehicle of national expression.... [It] appealed to this adolescent eagerness to appear worldly, independent, and paradigmatic. She was the birthplace of democracy. Her culture typified liberty, learning, and beauty. This culture, with credentials so unassailable as to be safe, was too universal to be appropriated exclusively by any single party or class.⁸⁶

In Canada, and more specifically Montreal, the greatest threat to national unity following Confederation was not sectarian politics or class conflict, although they did create their share of tensions, but relations between French and English.⁸⁷ In a building whose function was to house a national history museum that purported to tell the story of both French and English Canadians, it was essential that the overall design convey a message of universal appeal which transcended ethnic loyalties.

It is not known how Carnegie received David McCord's request to "kindly erect a building and provide for its equipment and maintenance." By the beginning of the twentieth century, Carnegie was no longer funding the more ambitious library-museum-concert hall projects of previous years. Up until that point, Carnegie's pattern of giving had conformed to the paternalist approach popular in the late nineteenth century, where projects of personal interest to the donor received monies. Philanthropists cast themselves in the role of benevolent father figures while the recipients acted out the role of adoring, dependent children. In this philanthropic scenario, inspired by the asymmetrical relationships that characterized the Victorian family, the tie that bound giver to recipient was the illusion of affection. This illusion was considered powerful enough to extend to perfect strangers whose only tenuous connection to the donor was a shared home-town. In Carnegie's case, his philanthropic career began with donations to towns where he had some sort of personal connection.⁸⁸ Twenty years later, this was no longer the case. Carnegie had initiated a revolution in philanthropy by

⁸⁵ See Richard Jenkyns, *The Victorians and Ancient Greece* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press 1980), pp. 1-20.

⁸⁶ Spiro Kostof, *A History of Architecture*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1995), p. 630.

⁸⁷ See Paul-André Linteau, "Les facteurs du développement de Montréal," in 1880, *Montréal Métropole*, 1930, p. 37, and Alan Gordon, *Making Public Pasts*, pp. 32-48.

⁸⁸ Abigail A. Van Slyck, *Free to All: Carnegie Libraries & American Culture, 1890-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), p. 11.

organizing his donations along corporate lines. Gone was the direct personal involvement of Carnegie himself, replaced by a set of guidelines that could be applied by trained administrators. It was a system designed for efficiency, bent on screening out subjective judgments, and in favour of abstract quantifiable criteria.⁸⁹

When McCord approached Carnegie by personal letter in 1906, it is more than likely the response he received came from a Carnegie employee well-versed in the policy applied to the type of donation McCord was seeking for his museum. The time was past when provisions for funding could be negotiated on a one-to-one basis with Carnegie himself. By the first decade of the twentieth century, agreements were much more likely to take the form of contracts drawn up between employees of the foundation and municipal administrators. Generally, these contracts contained the amount of the donation: Carnegie would provide funds of two dollars per capita to any town over a thousand people. Town councils were asked to reciprocate with a site for the library building, and provisions for its maintenance, acquisition of books, and salaries for the library staff, all from the revenue derived from taxing the original gift.

These changes to the philanthropic impulse did not bode well for McCord. As the child of a wealthy Protestant family, he had been raised in a tradition of giving that placed the emphasis on the personal responsibility of the giver and the unqualified deference of the receiver. A quotation taken from John Samuel's diary sums up well the kind of personal politics this form of giving encouraged.

A fine day and my dear little Anne's birthday, 6 years old – and the dear child had long looked forward to this day as one of expected pleasure, for on this day she anticipated giving the children of the Orphan Asylum a "tea party" at 3 pm, and several of the ladies ...? had been invited but alas her pleasant anticipations on this occasion were not realized. She slept uneasily the previous night and the morning complained of her stomach and of her own account called for a mustard emetic – after taking which with the half hours, the scalding declared itself....I took with me Eleanor, Jane, Robert and David. The little party went off pretty well, considering the little givers absence. I addressed the children and explained the absence of child, after which the Rev Mr. Bond made a beautiful address and prayer to the children, attending most eloquently to the interest and

⁸⁹ Ibid, p. 23.

merciful _____ not only for their welfare, not only temporal but spiritual as exemplified in a donation I had prepared of a set of 18 scripture pictures on cards which were presented for the use of the children. After a touching prayer for the dear child's speedy recovery, the children took their 'food things' with apparent pleasure and appetite by our own children waiting on them.⁹⁰

The Protestant Orphan Asylum was a family affair involving three generations of the McCord-Ross family.⁹¹ David McCord's maternal grandmother, Jane Ross, had been one of the asylum's founders; his mother Anne, the secretary until her death in 1870; and a younger sister, Annie, the treasurer. Although the asylum was run and managed by the women, the men were the public face of the asylum and active as fundraisers. John Samuel was the Asylum's legal counsel until his death, a position David Ross McCord inherited. What is more surprising, however, is David McCord's direct involvement with the children. As this newspaper clipping found in John Samuel's diary attests, women were not considered the only suitable caretakers of children:

The exhibition of oil and water color paintings, at the Mechanics Hall, has been during the last week very well attended. On Saturday the inmates of the Protestant orphan asylum, under the charge of the Matron and David McCord, Esq. through the kindness of the committee, visited gratuitously the exhibition. The children were delighted and some of their homely criticism were quite refreshing...⁹²

The old methods of influence centred on the powerful individual were no longer adequate in a world where decision-making was increasingly the prerogative of anonymous committees whose membership was drawn from outside McCord's immediate circle of former 'McGill men', Conservative party faithful and Anglican ladies and gentlemen. The limitations of this approach became obvious when McCord contacted McGill about his museum in 1908. Writing to an old family friend, Edward Black Greenshields, who was then a member of the McGill

⁹⁰ MCFP, file #411, John Samuel McCord's diary, November 20, 1854.

⁹¹ See Janice Harvey, "The Protestant Orphan Asylum and the Montreal Ladies Benevolent Society: A case study in Protestant child charity in Montreal, 1822-1900," Ph.D. History, McGill University, 2001.

⁹² MCFP, file #422, John Samuel McCord's diary's, unidentified newspaper clipping found in diary, Sunday, no date.

Board of Governors, McCord made his pitch to have the university buy his collection.

The Greenshields and McCords had been long-time associates of the Montreal Protestant Orphan Asylum, with first one and then the other family dominating the executive for over half a century. David McCord's sister, Anne, was for many years secretary, and Edward Black Greenshields' sister, treasurer, which involved both men in an annual ritual of speech-making on behalf of their female relatives, who wrote, but did not publicly present their section of the Asylum's annual report.⁹³ McCord, who also acted as the Asylum's lawyer, was frequently on the receiving end of irate messages from Greenshields, prodding him to take action in important legal matters affecting the Asylum's property, which it appears McCord was naturally inclined to let slide.⁹⁴ But despite the tensions in their professional relationship, Greenshields was far too important a figure in Montreal financial circles for McCord to pass up. Greenshields was described as being "one of twenty-three men who are, according to the *Montreal Standard*, at the basis of Canadian finance."⁹⁵ McCord felt he needed the support of Montreal's millionaires if his museum project was going to succeed.

McCord's 'unofficial' letter to Greenshields offering his collection to McGill was soon passed to the secretary of McGill University, William Vaughan. Vaughan, a native of England, had come to the university via the Canadian Pacific Railway upon the recommendation of Sir William Van Horne, another board member. A lawyer by profession, he quickly became 'the power behind the throne' at McGill, exercising substantial influence over its financial and business affairs.⁹⁶ In a letter to William Vaughan, McCord later made an awkwardly worded attempt to explain why he had written a personal letter to Greenshields instead of approaching the Board of Governors directly. "I was pleased when you acknowledged officially the letter I had written to Mr. E. B. Greenshields because

⁹³ NAC, Summerhill Home, MG 28, I 388, Vol. 8, file 2, 1893, Minute book, June 3, 1889-Jan. 4, 1894.

⁹⁴ MCFP, file #1014.1, Anne Ross McCord.

⁹⁵ Dr. Henry J. Morgan, *The Dictionary of Eminent Canadians*, (Ottawa: 1912), p. 472.

⁹⁶ Stanley Brice Frost, *McGill University for the Advancement of Learning*, Vol. II, p. 56.

of the personal tone of the letter would convey a more unresearched idea than had I addressed myself with Governors as a body.”⁹⁷

V

From the beginning, McGill showed a benign indifference towards McCord’s plans for a museum.

The subject of your collection was brought up by me [William Vaughan] at a meeting of the Board held on the 18th instant. I am sorry to say that there was a scant attendance of members and it was impossible to give the matter proper consideration. Some of the members present asked if there were any catalogue of any kind of your collection, and I promised to inquire. Have you such a thing? In the meantime, I am afraid that the matter must stand until we can get a fuller meeting of the Board some time next month.⁹⁸

In 1908, McGill University was in no rush to act upon McCord’s offer, a response that understandably infuriated McCord. Between the lines of Vaughan’s letter, written in pencil, was McCord’s reaction. Incensed by their inability to grasp the importance of his work, McCord writes:

I have a catalogue but no catalogue would convey any idea of the collection.... Prof. Colby & Mr. Gould who was here of late can give an excellent idea – its value is far greater. I have neither the desire nor necessity of speaking of my own work.... I have the first historical [collection] in the world. I expect others to [have] a vision of it.”⁹⁹

McCord’s grandiose claims revealed a side of his character that only hindered his cause. McCord had no patience for those who did not share his vision. His disdain often bordered on contempt. People who were in the best position to help him, Sir William Peterson, the principal of McGill, or William Macdonald, its chief benefactor, needed convincing. Neither felt the same passion

⁹⁷ (MUA), McGill University Correspondence, 1855-1951, David McCord Estate & Donations, DRM to William Vaughan, September 7, 1908.

⁹⁸ (MUA), McGill University Correspondence, 1855-1951, David McCord Estate & Donations, Vaughan to DRM, September 21, 1908. When Peterson took over the chair of the board of governors in 1907, many of the governors stopped attending. According to Stanley Frost, “Peterson was so very able and had imperceptibly taken over the direction of the university to such an extent that the lay members of the board [of governors] began to lose interest.” (*McGill University for the Advancement of Learning, Vol. II*, p. 85).

⁹⁹ MUA, McGill University Correspondence, 1855-1951, David McCord Estate & Donations, Vaughan to DRM, September 21, 1908.

for the Canadian past as McCord did. Peterson especially was reluctant to commit any of the university's resources to McCord's project. "You know how starved we are and how many things are before me personally, at the present moment, beginning with salaries of professors, that have first claim upon the liberality of our friends and supporters."¹⁰⁰

McCord made no bones about his dislike for Peterson. He judged him a poor leader when it came to defining the priorities of education at McGill in the new millennium. In a letter to Lighthall, McCord wrote: "McGill is evidently in a very poor [leader] less condition. No main spring to the watch."¹⁰¹ When Peterson arrived in Montreal in the fall of 1895, he found himself at the head of a university that was entirely dependent on the generosity of the surrounding business community for its funding. Unlike the University of Toronto, McGill received no money from the provincial government. Peterson himself was a classicist by training and had hoped to encourage the humanities at McGill. But the people he relied on to finance the university, men like Macdonald and Carnegie, were of a different type and saw no practical use for classical studies. Utilitarian in their thinking, they held that culture was useful if it advanced material progress but the opposite was not necessarily true, that material progress should come to the aid of culture. The attitude of many in the business community was summed up in an interview with Carnegie that ran in *The Montreal Star* under the headline "Carnegie's Tribute to McGill."

'...I believe that the continuance of Great Britain as one of the principal manufacturing nations will not be secured by having a greater number of her people learning the dead languages of dead nations, dwelling altogether in the past; but by a larger percentage of her young men becoming experts in various branches of science and being taught to be scientific managers of her industries displacing the rule-of-thumb managers. Therefore, while I cannot give money to advance classical studies, because I believe they have sufficient support, I did feel that I could give money to Birmingham for a scientific college, modelled after the best American or rather Canadian example. For the foremost scientific college in the world is to be found in Montreal.' The tribute to scientific department of McGill University should be very gratifying to its chief benefactor, Sir William McDonald. Certainly there are few men more

¹⁰⁰ MCFP, file #2051, William Peterson to DRM, June 17, 1909.

¹⁰¹ MCFP, file #2049, Correspondence with Lighthall, DRM to WDL, no date (circa 1909).

competent to give us an opinion on this subject that Mr. Andrew Carnegie and his statement that Montreal possessed the foremost scientific college in the world will be a source of pride to all Canadians who are interested in the progress of the Dominion.¹⁰²

If human sympathy is warmed by shared interests, then McCord and Peterson should have been boon companions. They first met in the fall of 1896 when Peterson arrived in Montreal to take up the position of principal. On the surface they had much to recommend each other. Both men shared a passion for the Classics, and a common worldview which placed the British Empire at the pinnacle of human achievement. Peterson wrote:

...we are proud of our imperial connection. For we know that in the world as we find it to-day, the strength and prosperity of our united Empire affords one of the best possible guarantees of order and freedom, justice, peace and progress.... In their combination in the British Empire they are the highest that has as yet been attained in the social and political development of the world.¹⁰³

Where they differed, perhaps, is the role they reserved for Canada in this vast empire. Like his friend Lighthall, McCord was a strong champion of a distinctly Canadian culture within the broader framework provided by British imperialism. Peterson's practice of returning to England at the end of each school year and his decision to have his sons educated in England would suggest that his attachment to Canada was more circumstantial.

When McCord applied for the Beit Chair of Colonial History at Oxford in 1905, one of the people he approached for a letter of support was Peterson. The letter Peterson wrote, the only one submitted by an academic, was less than effusive. "I am sure you must be deeply gratified by the wide support which you tell me your candidature is receiving from those who know your work."¹⁰⁴ Peterson wrote of the zealotry McCord brought to the task of acquiring

¹⁰² *The Montreal Star*, "Carnegie's Tribute to McGill," January 3, 1900, p. 2.

¹⁰³ William Peterson as quoted in Stanley Frost, *McGill University for the Advancement of Learning*, Vol. II, p. 96.

¹⁰⁴ MCFP, file #1803, Beit Chair, William Peterson to DRM, June 7, 1905. The other letters, from judges and Anglican clergy, in contrast, were all generous in their praise of McCord's learning in the field of colonial history. What J. A.S. Carmichael, coadjutor of the Bishop of Montreal, wrote was echoed in the other letters: "I regard Mr. McCord as the best informed man in Canada on general Colonial History and on the possibilities as well as the dangers of colonies."

knowledge of Canadian history but made no comment on the actual state of his knowledge – a telling omission given the purpose of the letter. Peterson leaves the impression that he has some serious reservations about the man he is writing about.

McCord had supporters but he also had his share of detractors. His eccentricities kept some people at arms length. Pam Miller, former archivist of the McCord family papers writes: “Most people remembered McCord as an incredible eccentric, obsessed by his museum, a man who went to any length to obtain artifacts for his collection. Relatives hesitated to leave him alone in their drawing rooms, for fear of losing their prized possessions.”¹⁰⁵ In one of his historical notebooks, McCord acknowledged “I stole what I could not buy. Arrogance.” Sir Frederick Williams-Taylor, head of the Bank of Montreal, and one of his supporters alluded to the problems inherent in working with McCord in a letter to W.D. Lighthall.

Our friend, David McCord, is misunderstood and unappreciated by all but a few people in this good town. To me it is quite pathetic that a man who has such good historical material and is so anxious to leave it, and his estate as well, to his country should at his advanced age find everyone apathetic. His own personality has a great deal to do with it but that does not make the situation less pathetic. It is a pleasure and duty to be of some assistance to him.¹⁰⁶

Peterson was not the most popular man in Montreal, either. Considered austere and controlling by some in Montreal’s business community, his personality was seen as an impediment to McGill’s fundraising efforts. Hugh Graham (Lord Atholstan), owner of the Montreal Star, offered to raise money for McGill but only if Peterson agreed to step aside and let Graham lead the campaign. The offer was declined.¹⁰⁷ Peterson’s opinion of Montreal’s business leaders wasn’t any more favourable than theirs of him. In an address to the

¹⁰⁵ Pamela Miller, “‘When There Is No Vision, the People Perish’. The McCord Family Papers, 1766-1945,” *Fontanus*, Vol. 3, 1990, p. 29.

¹⁰⁶ MCFP, file #2001, Sir Frederick Williams to WDL, April 8, 1916.

¹⁰⁷ Stanley Frost, *McGill University for the Advancement of Learning*, Vol. II, p. 25.

McGill Graduate's Society in New York, he began his speech by launching an attack against Montrealers for not supporting their university.¹⁰⁸

Forced to wait more than a decade to realize his dream of founding a museum, McCord was in need of someone to blame for the delays that had cost him his peace of mind, and Peterson was an obvious candidate. McGill University's reluctance to accept McCord's donation coincided with Peterson's tenure as university principal. "The facts are these: the moment Peterson disappeared, he having been the obstacle during practically his whole term of office to my making my donation – this was no secret to a great many about the College...." ¹⁰⁹ In addition to their personal differences, tensions surfaced over their competing fundraising agendas. During the decade McCord was trying to get McGill to provide him with a building for his museum, he was also busy soliciting funds for his project from Montreal's business community - the same community McGill relied upon for donations.

McCord was quite candid about the place Montreal millionaires had in his museum plans: "A prime object I have, is to enlist the sympathies of the rich ... into making a museum worthy of the metropolis..."¹¹⁰ McCord was forever despairing at the number of millionaires Montreal possessed – sixty was the number he gave – and to what little good effect their money was being used. Pitted against McGill in his efforts to raise money for his museum, McCord lacked the resources to compete with the university's more sophisticated fundraising campaigns. In 1913, McCord wrote:

there is 'high finance' & I think in McGill Governors high bluff.... I notified WH Birks that I would write an open letter to the Press so that there would not rest on me any responsibility. Montreal would have thus far _____ of my banishment. that such [a thing could happen] would be a great scandal in a city with admittedly 60 millionaires but I would be clear of all responsibility.¹¹¹

In the interests of maintaining an English-speaking culture in Montreal, McCord's objective was to encourage a partnership between this 'new money' and the

¹⁰⁸ *The Montreal Herald*, 'Why Montrealers Should Aid McGill', March 26, 1909, p. 5.

¹⁰⁹ MCFP, file #2052, Museum correspondence, DRM to Sir Vincent Meredith.

¹¹⁰ NAC, Lighthall Papers, MG29D93, McCord correspondence, file #28, November 10, 1911.

¹¹¹ MCFP, file #1815, March 27, 1913, DRM to WDL.

cultural aspirations of the 'old'.¹¹² As a member of an 'old' Montreal family, McCord saw his contribution to the city's cultural life and to Canada in general as taking the form of a historical legacy with which future generations would interpret their lives. But for this he needed money. In a letter addressed to the President of the Royal Bank of Canada from the President of the Royal Bank of Canadian History, McCord wrote:

You are the centre of a strong group. You have only to express a wish and it is done, or a stroke of your own pen would do it. We are proud of you – you can make railways and banks, and many other great things. This humble President of the Royal Bank of Canadian History knows what is rare for History. If I were richer I would ask no man – I would simply continue to buy and buy. I am not asking for myself, I am only asking partners of a high grade for Canada, for no one will ever do what I have done. I think you will agree with me when rarities appear they should be secured if the Museum is to be kept at the high standard at which I have created it.¹¹³

McCord tied his authority on cultural matters to his membership in the old elite. His conviction, that he had a special role to play in perpetuating English-Canadian culture, was shaped by his anglophilism and by his romantic attachment to English feudalism.¹¹⁴ He particularly identified with the part played by the landed gentry. In this traditional society structured by bonds of deference, the aristocracy and the gentry provided the hereditary leadership.¹¹⁵

McCord's museum campaign can also be understood in light of what American historian, Richard Hofstadter has identified as the status revolution: a

¹¹² See Jean-Claude Robert, *Atlas historique de Montréal*, pp. 110-128, Paul-André Linteau and Jean-Claude Robert, "Propriété foncière et société à Montréal," *Revue d'histoire de l'Amérique française*, Vol. 28, No. 1, juin 1984, pp. 45-65, and Paul-André Linteau, *Montréal depuis la Confédération* (Montréal: Boréal, 1992).

¹¹³ MCFP, file #2053, DRM to President of the Royal Bank of Canada, Nov. 21, 1919.

¹¹⁴ See Ian McKay on "the fierce anglophilia of the Anglo-Canadian cultural elite" in *The Quest of the Folk: Antimodernism and cultural selection in Twentieth-Century Nova Scotia* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press), pp. 63-66. McCord's interest in the symbols of English feudalism was first manifest in his drawing of a heraldic emblem of Ivanhoe at the age of seven. As an adult he was drawn to the accoutrements of feudal warfare. A suite of arms from the War of the Roses greeted visitors at the entrance to Temple Grove. See Donald Wright, "David Ross McCord's Crusade," in *The McCord Family*, Pam Miller et al., and "Remembering War in Imperial Canada: David Ross McCord and The McCord National Museum," *Fontanus*, IX, 1996, pp. 12-19.

¹¹⁵ See J.F.C. Harrison, *The Early Victorians, 1832-1851* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1971), pp. 89-92.

“changed pattern in the distribution of deference and power,” that took place during the closing decades of the nineteenth century and early in the twentieth century.¹¹⁶ Writing about the United States, Hofstadter describes the negative impact of change wrought by the growth of cities, rapid industrialization, the construction of railways, and the emergence of the corporation as the dominant form of business organization, on a group he referred to as the ‘Mugwump type’ (old gentry, established professional men, small manufactures and local merchants). Overtaken by the greater wealth and power of a new social class made up of corporate managers and industrialists, the old elite saw their status and influence radically decline in relation to the newly wealthy. The social dynamics Hofstadter ascribes to industrializing United States were North American wide.¹¹⁷ In this context, McCord’s museum project can be seen as an attempt at regaining lost prestige, both for his family and for the social class to which they belonged.

McCord’s struggle to overcome McGill’s indifference to what, in his eyes, was a generous donation, was a constant reminder to McCord of his marginality in relation to the university and to the small group of wealthy, English-speaking donors, whose support he was seeking. Peterson wanted McCord to be patient and wait until the university had sufficient funds to integrate McCord’s museum into their own plans for expansion. Peterson wrote that, “...we should be delighted to provide special accommodation in the new wing of the Library as soon as we are put in a position to make the necessary extension.”¹¹⁸ But when that would be was left sufficiently vague. The lukewarm response displayed by Peterson and other members of the McGill Board of Governors was, fortunately for McCord, not the institution’s final word. In Charles Gould, the university’s librarian, the McCord Museum would find one of its greatest champions. Gould, a McGill graduate and prizewinner in classics, returned to McGill in September 1893 to begin what would be his life work of establishing a comprehensive, “largely centralized and

¹¹⁶ Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform* (New York: Vintage, 1955), p. 135.

¹¹⁷ See J.M.S. Careless, *Toronto to 1918: An Illustrated History* (Toronto: J. Lorimer, 1984), pp. 149-152.

¹¹⁸ MCFP, file #2051, Donation of Museum to McGill University, 1908-1919, William Peterson to DRM, March 16, 1911.

up-to-date university library.”¹¹⁹ In 1908, it was Gould who initiated the search for a building suitable for housing McCord’s collection. He came up with the Gibb House on University Street, where Sir William Dawson had once lived. McCord was less than enthusiastic about Gould’s choice, finding the house “too small and as part of two houses, not dignified,”¹²⁰ – a far cry from what he imagined as the appropriate setting for Canada’s first national history museum:

Gould has offered me a building.... I will go to see it - but I do not take to it at all. Here I am in a dignified position on the finest site on the island – with the only collection on the continent - even if I have the misfortune to live a half century too soon. It is not a question of the beginning of something – it is the housing in a becoming manner of a fine collection.¹²¹

McCord had already set his sights on another McGill building, the former Joseph house. ‘Dilcoosha’ as it was called by its original owner, or ‘Heart’s Delight’ as it was translated into English, held tremendous appeal for David McCord in name and location. Built on the north-east corner of Sherbrooke and McTavish streets, adjacent to the McGill campus, it came with an already impressive address. A century ago the mansions that lined Sherbrooke Street stood as a monuments to the fortunes of Victorian Canada’s railway-building, banking and industrial bourgeoisie. Along Montreal’s most prestigious boulevard, drawing comparisons to New York’s Fifth Avenue or the Champs Elysées, rose the ivy covered mansions of the *nouveau riche*, the English-speaking and mostly Protestant elite who ruled Canada at the beginning of the twentieth century.¹²² This was the main axis of the ‘Golden Square Mile’ or ‘New Town’, as it was called by nineteenth-century residents.¹²³ Until the beginning of the 1930s, 25,000 residents lived in the area between Côte-des-Neiges Road and Bleury, whose

¹¹⁹ Elizabeth Hanson, *A Jewel in the Park*, p. 107.

¹²⁰ MCFP, file #2049, Lighthall correspondence, DRM to WDL, no date.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Jean-Claude Marsan in *Montreal in Evolution* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1981), p. 290, argues that the planning of Sherbrooke St. was inspired by examples from the French Second Empire. Roderick MacLeod in “Salubrious Settings and Fortunate Families: the Making of Montreal’s Golden Square Mile, 1840-1895,” Ph.D. History, McGill University, 1997, identifies the example of Edinburgh’s New Town as an important influence on the laying out of Sherbrooke St. and the surrounding neighbourhood.

¹²³ According to Margaret Westley, the term ‘Golden Square Mile’ did not come into usage until after World War I, and then only among people who didn’t live there. *Remembrance of Grandeur: The Anglo-Protestant Elite of Montreal, 1900-1950* (Montreal: Libre Expression 1990), p. 25.

collective incomes in the last decades of the nineteenth century, represented seventy percent of Canada's wealth.¹²⁴

Men like Jesse Joseph who relocated to the 'New Town' were colonial managers for the most part, who unfettered by the financial constraints associated with income tax, built palaces in classical and renaissance styles that hinted at magisterial authority and an unbroken link with imperial pasts. The façades of these mansions were designed to catch and hold the eye with a message telegraphed by every excessively detailed cornice and faux antique moulding, that this was a home of fabulous wealth. The facades varied in their design but they remained uniform in their opulence. In the voluptuous gardens that surrounded these buildings were found the horticultural counterpart to the ornate Victorian screen which acted as a filter to keep nature close at hand and the intrusive presence of the city with its unwanted smells, sounds and gazes at arms length. Stephen Leacock who inhabited the area during his tenure as professor of political economy at McGill University, passed the following judgment on his neighbours: "The rich in Montreal had too much. They got in the way...[they] enjoyed a prestige in that era that not even the rich deserve."¹²⁵

'Dilcoosha' was the Egyptian-Renaissance fantasy of Jesse Joseph, a successful industrialist, banker, and consul to Belgium.¹²⁶ Joseph, then a bachelor in his mid-forties, had the house built for himself and his two unmarried sisters to accommodate a lifestyle that increasingly involved the pursuit of various bourgeois Victorian 'manly' pleasures. A few years prior to its construction in 1865, Joseph gave up active involvement with his commercial interests in favour of assuming the directorships of a number of public companies. According to historian W.H. Atherton, he was either president or director of over fifteen companies or institutions during this period.¹²⁷ He was also one of the founders of the Montreal SPCA.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Stephen Leacock, *Leacock's Montreal* (Toronto & Montreal: McClelland and Stewart Ltd., 1963), pp. 233-235.

¹²⁶ Donald MacKay, *Golden Square Mile* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1987), p. 77.

¹²⁷ Alice Johannsen Turnham, "The Passing of a Landmark," *The McGill News*, Autumn, 1954. Jesse Joseph was involved with the construction of the Champlain Railway. He also founded the Joseph Gas Co., which later became the Montreal Light, Heat and Power Co., the Montreal Street

'Heart's Delight' was a suitably exotic setting for a man whose family had made its fortune in the import-export trade. A society host as well as a deeply religious man, Joseph was a member of the synagogue and his consuming passions included the breeding of thoroughbred race horses (one of which won the Queen's Plate), gardening (his tulip beds were the envy of city flower growers), and the entertainment of young British colonial officers and their consorts. His residence frequently served as the backdrop for many of Montreal's 'haut-ton' gatherings. "Mr. Joseph's hospitality was lavish, and his generosity unbounded; few Montreal houses have experienced so many gay dances, so many fine social functions as his," wrote the *Montreal Herald*.¹²⁸

The recurring pattern of Egyptian motifs carved in stone on the building's façade made the house exotic. Its features hinted at the exceptionalism conferred on the Josephs by their Jewishness in an overwhelmingly Protestant neighbourhood. Built when Sherbrooke Street was still a dirt lane, the entrance was approached from a gravelled carriage road which moved past one of a pair of limestone gates to the imposing main door and then around in a broad curve to the coach house in the rear.¹²⁹ Beyond the coach house were the terraced gardens designed by Jesse Joseph. There, in the slightly higher elevation and exposed to the southern light, Joseph's vineyards produced some of the best quality grapes on the continent.¹³⁰ The house itself was built to endure. The roof was constructed on giant trusses more commonly found in fortresses than in domestic architecture. The interior space, spread out on three floors, reflected the Victorian preoccupation with embellishment and minutiae. A special 'golden square mile' pastiche of styles translated into crystal, plaster and wood, decorated the drawing room, dining room, library and study on the main floor and the eight bedrooms above.

Railway Co., and the National Bank. See Anne Joseph, *Heritage of a Patriarch* (Sillery: Editions du Septentrion, 1995), pp. 153, 163-64, 240-42, 246-47, 266-7, 287-88, 291, 296-97, 300, 315, 319, 354, 359, 369, 376-77, 379-80.

¹²⁸ *The Montreal Herald*, June 5, 1909, pp. 1-2.

¹²⁹ Alice Johannsen Turnham, "The Passing of a Landmark," *The McGill News*, Autumn 1954.

¹³⁰ *The Montreal Herald*, 'The quiet old ivy covered house', June 5, 1909, p. 1.

Dilcoosha was certainly large enough and elaborate enough to suit McCord's needs, but beyond its physical attributes, the house also carried a personal meaning. 'Dilcoosha' had been built for David McCord's second cousin. Rachel Solomon, Jesse Joseph's mother, was the sister of Sarah Solomon, second wife to Thomas McCord, and the mother of John Samuel McCord, David's father. David McCord was famous for his relentless pursuit of family, friends, and acquaintances in his quest to find a public home for his collection, but he made little of this Jewish connection.¹³¹ There is no mention of the Josephs or their relationship to the McCord family anywhere in David McCord's papers. Given the difficulties David McCord encountered in trying to obtain the house, it is interesting that he chose not to use this family connection as a lever for getting what he so strongly desired.

McGill University, however, had other plans for 'Dilcoosha' which did not include a history museum. Sir William Macdonald, who had purchased the property for the university, made it clear from the outset that he did not want the building to be used for that purpose.¹³² He suggested it be designated the principal's residence. The University, on the other hand, had other, more pressing needs to consider. In response to David McCord's request that 'Dilcoosha' be handed over to him for his history museum, Peterson wrote:

I very much sympathize with your desire to see your collection properly housed. At the same time, it is difficult to see how the site recently acquired by Sir William could be made available for any such national museum as you speak of. In the first place, the back lot is mortgaged for extensions to the Library and the much needed gymnasium. This would leave only the existing house and grounds and while we have had very little talk on the subject since the purchase, I fancy that a Convocation Hall is in the minds of many of the members of the Board of Governors. If it should be possible to get money for the Museum why not provide that it should be ultimately erected on the site of Temple Grove itself? That would surely be the best way of perpetuating your name and your work. I am very glad indeed to hear that so munificent a friend as Mr. James Douglas has given you some encouragement in the matter of subscription.

¹³¹ See Anne Joseph, *Heritage of a Patriarch*, pp. 410-411.

¹³² See *The Montreal Herald* articles: 'Ritz People Not Behind Project in Montreal', June 5, 1909, p. 1; 'McGill Saves Site at Cost of Dignity', June 9, 1909, p. 2; 'Joseph House May Be Principal's', June 19, 1909, p. 2.

I have been hearing a good deal lately about the proposed museum for Toronto and know also what is expected of the Victoria and Albert Museum at Ottawa. These are large undertakings compared with anything that McGill is ever likely to be in a position to take up. You know how starved we are and how many things are before me personally, at the present moment, beginning with salaries of professors, that have first claim upon the liberality of our friend and supporters. At the same time you know that we do not fail in any way of appreciation of your efforts and that we all know the value of the collection that you have made.¹³³

McCord remained adamant that he would accept no other building. "If I take possession of the Joseph House – and I will accept nothing else – it may take five years to erect the great Temple and add 5 [years] to 66, Act, it is a serious question."¹³⁴

McCord was willing to sweeten the pot by adding \$60,000 a year to his donation along with money for a chair in Canadian history to be held by the next director, but McGill still refused to budge. In 1911 the answer was still 'no' although Peterson's delivery was a little less emphatic.

...we all sympathize with you and the work you are doing, and your written statement that you are planning to endow your collection with \$60,000 or more ought to make matters a little easier. You ask why you can't get the Joseph House, and the answer is that even if we had control of it, apart from the views of the kind friend who bought it, we have no money to put it in order or to spend on maintenance, care-taking, etc. In reply to a verbal communication made by a friend the other day, I sent word to say that we should be delighted to provide special accommodation in the new wing of the Library as soon as we are put in a position to make the necessary extension. That ought to show how gladly we shall assume the responsibility of the care of your collection as soon as it is made possible for us to do so.¹³⁵

Throughout the decade that McCord was trying to wrest the Joseph house from McGill, he was often ill. His own mortality was never far from his mind. Moreover, he complained of 'anxiety and sadness', which he attributed to McGill's delaying tactics. He had little use for the men he was forced to negotiate with. Peterson he described as "the thin weak tube of a principal," and of the

¹³³ MCFP, file #2051, "Donation of museum to McGill University, 1908-1919," W. Peterson to DRM, June 17, 1909.

¹³⁴ NAC, file #2049, DRM to WDL, May 28, 1910.

Board of Governors he wrote: "It has been proved that men can build Railways & pay large Bank dividends & cannot conduct a University."¹³⁶ McCord felt unappreciated by the university and by the leaders in the Montreal business community who had the power to help him realize his dream but were more interested in endowing hospitals and university science buildings.

At the same time he was negotiating with McGill, McCord was also threatening to take his collection out of Montreal to Toronto or Winnipeg. In an open letter to the *Montreal Gazette* he wrote:

Most people are aware that circumstances have enabled me to be the custodian and creator of a National Museum for Canada. I have nothing that the British Museum would not be glad to possess. Its priceless value is well known to educationalists & others. It has, naturally, always been my hope that I would not have to leave Montreal, in order to find a suitable building large enough to contain it.

The opposite now confronts me, after every tentative on my part – I am proud to belong to a community – which admirably meets its religious & benevolent obligations, but history does not appeal. I have waited for many years. At my time of life further delay would not be prudent.... The object of this letter is to reluctantly relieve myself of further responsibility towards the city and Province.¹³⁷

But it was the City of Westmount, an upper-class suburb of Montreal, which provided the most serious alternative to McGill. As much as McCord was attached to the idea of having his museum be a part of the university, it did not deter him from pursuing other possibilities.¹³⁸ A natural choice was joining with Lighthall's Château de Ramezay, but McCord wanted the Antiquarian and Numismatic Society which ran the museum to hand over complete control of their museum to him. "I would have nothing to do with the Château unless the whole collection were handed to me – to deal with as I wished.... I am spending far more than the whole revenue of the Château de Ramezay."¹³⁹ Negotiations went

¹³⁵ MCFP, file #2051, "Donation of museum to McGill University, 1908-1919," W. Peterson to DRM, March 3, 1911.

¹³⁶ NAC, file #2049, DRM to WDL, May 28, 1910.

¹³⁷ MCFP, file #2048, *The Montreal Gazette*, circa 1910, DRM to *Montreal Gazette*.

¹³⁸ Included in the list of possibilities were the University of Toronto, where DRM wanted to establish himself as a chair of Canadian or American history, an unnamed university in Winnipeg, the Provincial and Federal governments, the Mechanics Institute, and the Château de Ramezay.

¹³⁹ MCFP, file #2049, DRM to WDL, December 12, 1910.

back and forth for a time but McCord's wish to absorb their collection was a major stumbling block.

In the spring of 1908 McCord was approached by Samuel Grove, publisher/editor of *The Westmount News*, with the idea of making a museum of his collection sponsored by the City of Westmount. Grove's enthusiasm for the project was such that, despite a job in the Department of Mines which kept him in Ottawa during the week, he found the time to run off a full-page article with illustrations championing the idea of a Canadian history museum in Westmount Park. Groves began:

In one of his songs of freedom, Lowell sings: 'Once to every man and nation, Comes the moment to decide'. Such a psychological moment is before Westmount now. A rare chance is within the grasp of the municipality. Yonder in a Doric Greek temple in the slope of Mount Royal, are historic treasures which millionaires of the type of Waldorf Astor and J. Pierpont Morgan – were they Canadians, and if money could buy – would give a fortune to possess.¹⁴⁰

Tailoring his sales pitch to fit the concerns of his tax-conscious Westmount subscribers, Grove went on to highlight the cultural and material benefits such a museum would bring to the community. "It seems to us, that property and real estate owners should be enthusiastically in favour of this movement; since the fame of the museum would attract the class of visitors who have the means of buying homes; while every father and mother eager for the higher education of their children, should vote for the proposal with both hands."¹⁴¹ McCord's hopes for the museum were even more inflated. In his draft proposal to Westmount City Council, David McCord wrote: "I can see possibilities of making Westmount the museum centre of Canada."¹⁴²

Throughout 1908 and 1909 Samuel Grove kept the issue alive in the pages of his newspaper with special articles and weekly listings which advertised the McCord Museum as one of Westmount's coming attractions. The articles, written in admonishing tones, informed readers in no uncertain terms of what a "golden

¹⁴⁰ *The Westmount News*, 'Proposed National Museum', May 2, 1908, p. 1. Punctuation and emphasis in the original.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴² MCFP, file #2048, "Draft Suggestions to Westmount," no date.

opportunity” Westmount was letting slip by “in not making an earnest endeavour to secure these priceless treasures in a suitable building in our public park.”¹⁴³ The prospect of a Greek temple rising up in Westmount Park, with the inscription ‘The McCord National Museum of Westmount’, appealed to more than a few people. In July 1908, *The Canadian Municipal Journal* carried a profile of the City of Westmount, which included a paragraph-long description of the McCord Museum project.¹⁴⁴

McCord had every reason to feel confident of winning over Westmount City Council. One of his staunchest supporters, William D. Lighthall, was the former mayor of Westmount, and despite his retirement from City Council in 1903, a still powerful force on Westmount City Council. An indication of the kind of esteem in which Lighthall was held by city officials was manifest at the first meeting held after Westmount received its municipal charter. Lighthall was chosen to sit next to the mayor in the place of honour.¹⁴⁵ Lighthall was enthusiastic about both Grove the man and his idea for the museum. “Mr. Grove’s idea is that of a cultured man of fine tone of heart and mind. His idea of establishing a National Museum Building in Westmount Park strikes me well – because it could be made a “twin” with the Library and be run in the same excellent and honest way, very economically and at the same time tastefully.”¹⁴⁶

McCord had his own presence at City Hall. While not officially a resident, McCord nonetheless took a keen interest in the functioning of local government.¹⁴⁷ By the first decade of the twentieth century most of his income came from revenue-producing properties in Westmount. He too was singled out for praise by the mayor following the passage of the Westmount City charter. In his summing up, Mayor Galbraith commended David McCord, K.C. for having

¹⁴³ *The Westmount News*, ‘Waken Up, Westmount’, February 27, 1909, p. 1.

¹⁴⁴ *The Canadian Municipal Journal*, July 1908.

¹⁴⁵ Westmount City Council (WCC), Minutes, May 4, 1908.

¹⁴⁶ MCFP, file #2049, W.D. Lighthall to DRM, April 9, 1908.

¹⁴⁷ In 1910, McCord wrote a letter to the *Westmount News*, decrying the possible extension of the business district in Westmount. The publication of his letter was in conjunction with a protest to prevent the passing of a bylaw which threatened to extend the business section of Sherbrooke Street to beyond Victoria. *The Westmount News*, ‘Citizens Aroused’, February 11, 1910, p. 1.

“done a great deal, declaring that if he was one of ourselves he could not have done more.”¹⁴⁸

David McCord had written to Mayor Galbraith on a few occasions with his museum suggestions, but in reply had only received vague assurances from the mayor’s secretary that the matter had been referred to a special sub-committee made up of the mayor, Alderman Rutherford and Fetherston.¹⁴⁹ Matters appear to have remained at a standstill until the beginning of 1909, when, following the annual municipal elections which saw a change of mayor and the disappearance of all but one member of the special museum sub-committee, McCord once again brought his proposal before the mayor’s office. This time however, he was asked by the mayor’s secretary to submit it in writing, “and also, for the information of some of the new members to specify how the collection which you propose to donate is composed.”¹⁵⁰ This request forced McCord, for the first time, to commit to paper a detailed description of what his museum would look like and how it would function. In a draft, he illustrated his proposal with sketches of a Greek Temple (his building of choice) resembling the one he had described in his letter to Carnegie. To this he added the conditions attached to his donation, which for the most part remained constant no matter what party he was negotiating with:

The City to heat, light and protect it by police, to pay for such interior assistance, clerical and guardian as may be necessary. My plan will be so to describe the pictures and objects by typewritten labels, that question will be almost eliminated. Such interior assistance to be selected, engaged and dismissed by me, for the reasons of the necessary intimate relations with me as Director, such persons must be personae gratae to the Director as they would represent him in his absence and relieve the Counsel of all worry and difficulties of patronage. I take possession of the museum as fully as if it were my own house, without interference(sic) of any kind from Westmount or its Council during my lifetime and will add to the collection as I can do to any extent. On my death the collection to belong to Westmount and a trust deed to be prepared, providing for successors as Directors, in such terms that suitable person be always procurable – this especially as it might so happen that Westmount would be later in Montreal. It might be arranged also that the museum should never be removed from the park in such event.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁸ *The Westmount News*, “Proceedings of the Westmount City Council,” May 9, 1908, p. 1.

¹⁴⁹ MCFP, file #2048, Correspondence from the City of Westmount to DRM.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid*, February 17, 1909.

¹⁵¹ MCFP, file #2048, “Draft Suggestions to Westmount,” no date.

On June 6th, the museum proposal came up at City Council. On the same day, the *Montreal Herald* published an article entitled, "Offers Westmount Historic Relics," and then nothing. Silence.

The minutes of Westmount City Council suggest some of the reasons why City Hall did not jump at the chance of committing tax payers' money to McCord's museum. In 1909 council was being pressured on all sides to improve municipal services without raising taxes. A fire station was an urgent need as was a town hall, and for others, a new children's wing for the Westmount library.¹⁵² Counsellors were also distracted by talk of a forced annexation of Westmount by Montreal, and the anticipated merger of the western half of N.D.G. with Westmount.¹⁵³ It did not appear to be a propitious moment for Westmount, a small, newly enfranchised city threatened by annexation, to assume the costs of building and maintaining a Greek temple to house one tax-payer's history collection. United in their commitment to provide 'good government', an approach which called for the maintenance of a balanced budget, Westmount City Council had no desire to emulate their poorer suburban neighbours, whose accumulated debt from ambitious building programs had left them easy victims of Montreal's annexation drive.¹⁵⁴

Perhaps McCord's enthusiasm for a Westmount site for his museum was also beginning to wane as the threat of annexation became more pronounced in the latter half of 1909. Fear for the future of his collection prompted McCord, at the start of 1909, to include in his proposal to the City of Westmount a proviso which stipulated that in the event of Westmount being annexed by the City of Montreal, the McCord Museum would remain permanently in Westmount Park. McCord had no faith in the City of Montreal's administrative abilities. At the end of the year when discussions for the Montreal municipal library were resumed,

¹⁵² WCC, Minutes, 1909.

¹⁵³ *The Westmount News*, 'Local Faint-Hearts', February 29, 1908, p. 1.

¹⁵⁴ See Stephen Leacock, *Montreal: Seaport and City* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1948), pp. 231-2, and Jean-Pierre Collin et Michèle Dagenais, "Evolution des enjeux politiques locaux et des pratiques municipales dans l'île de Montréal, 1840-1950," in *Enjeux et expressions de la politique municipale (XIIIe-XXe siècles)*, ed. Denis Menjot et Jean-Luc Pinol (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1997), pp. 199-202.

this time resurrected by Montreal's intended purchase of Quebec government archivist Philéas Gagnon's library, McCord was scathing at the prospect of the city involving itself in the administration of a public library:¹⁵⁵

Can there be anything more out of place – far too mild an expression – than the City desiring to have those books of Gagnon!! The whole idea of a civic library is wrong. The books – as an abstract question would increase educational interest in Montreal – in the light of my museum also but not in the hands of the city. I would give you a month for the gems to be stolen!¹⁵⁶

McCord left no doubt as to the possibility of his 'treasures' ever being subjected to the same fate. Despite a flirtation with the possibility of moving his collection to the University of Toronto or to Winnipeg, McCord was committed to Montreal but not to her city administration. McCord, who approached both the provincial and federal governments for support, remained surprisingly aloof from the City of Montreal. The only record of McCord seeking assistance from the city was when, in 1918, he applied for a tax exemption for the former George Washington Stephen House, another site he had hoped to use.¹⁵⁷

McCord's relationship with the Montreal municipal government was a complex one. Thirty-five years as alderman for Centre Ward (1874-1882), then as director of the municipal health commission, and finally as lawyer for the city as well as legate (in one legal case he managed to be both) had resulted in deep antagonisms. In the 1870s, while he was director of the Municipal Health Commission, McCord had been helpless to intervene when Letitia Chambers, his future wife and then matron of the Montreal Smallpox Hospital, was forced to resign her post because she was a Protestant. An early casualty of the English elite's slow slide from civic power, Chambers became the target of the French-Canadian Catholic majority on city council who insisted on the inappropriateness

¹⁵⁵ *The Montreal Herald*, 'Montreal May Buy Famous Library', Nov. 18, 1909, p. 10. See letter to WDL from DRM, MCFP, file #2049, December 5, 1910: "I am against any building by the city."

¹⁵⁶ MCFP, file #2049, DRM to WD Lighthall, no date.

¹⁵⁷ MCFP, file #2049, DRM to Ernest Décary, Chairman of the Commissioners of the City of Montreal.

of having an Irish Protestant head Montreal's civic hospital where the majority of patients were of the Catholic faith.¹⁵⁸

After McCord left City Council, his extended circle continued to reflect his interest in municipal reform. Sir Frederick Williams-Taylor, General Manager of the Bank of Montreal; the historian, Dr. W.D. Atherton; George Washington Stephens, whose house McCord would seek for his museum; and the Lighthalls, were all vocal critics of the free spending, debt accumulating practices identified with a succession of Montreal administrations.¹⁵⁹ Although no longer a councillor, McCord continued to be active at the municipal level well into the 1890s with attempts at lobbying the provincial government over legislation affecting the City of Montreal's charter.¹⁶⁰

Reform movements, calling for fairer taxation and an end to municipal graft and corruption, were a permanent fixture in Montreal municipal politics from the mid 1890s onward. Herbert Ames, author of *City Below the Hill* (a critique of the overcrowded and unsanitary conditions of working-class Griffintown), and director of the Ames-Holden Company, founded the Volunteer Electoral League in 1894. The following year, Ames and George Washington Stephens, spokesman on city council for the affluent West end, and president of the Canadian Rubber Company, began the Good Government Association.¹⁶¹ Groups came and went, but their leadership remained relatively unchanged. As much as they took care to appear otherwise, the reform minded were drawn mostly from Montreal's wealthy, English-speaking, business class who were reacting to their slow slide from power at the municipal level. Annexation, which

¹⁵⁸ Guy Bourassa, "Les élites politiques de Montréal: de l'aristocratie à la démocratie," *Le Personnel politique québécois*, ed. Richard Desrosiers (Montréal: Boréal Express, 1972), pp. 127-132.

¹⁵⁹ See Sir Frederick Williams-Taylor in Dr. Henry J. Morgan, *The Dictionary of Eminent Canadians*, (Ottawa: 1912), p. 1065. George Washington Stephens (1832-1904) graduated from McGill University with a law degree in 1863. He was president of the Montreal Gas Company, the Canadian Pacific Railway, and the Montreal Arts Association. From 1868 until 1892, with the exception of a couple of brief interruptions, Stephens was a member of Montreal city council. He was also the founder of Montreal Good Government Association. MCFP, "Originals and Printed Materials, 1928-1938," (unaccessioned)

¹⁶⁰ *The Montreal Star*, 'The Missing Mrs Murphy,' December 12, 1896, p. 16.

¹⁶¹ Michel Gauvin, "The Reformer and the Machine: Montreal Civic Politics from Raymond Préfontaine to Médéric Martin," *Journal of Canadian Studies/Revue d'études canadiennes*, Vol. 13, No. 2 (1978), p. 17.

involved the introduction of mostly French-speaking suburbs into Montreal's jurisdiction, had tipped the balance of power on council in favour of the French-speaking, East end majority. Political rivalries in Montreal remained ethnically coded despite the reform movements' best efforts to downplay the importance of linguistic and cultural differences.¹⁶²

In 1918, Médéric Martin, the outspoken French Canadian nemesis of the West end reformers, was once again returned to the mayor's office.¹⁶³ However, it was an office largely devoid of power, through the intervention of the provincial government, which had placed Montreal under the direction of an appointed Administrative Commission. Sir Frederick Williams-Taylor, General Manager of the Bank of Montreal, writing to David McCord on the eve of these events, summed up the private thoughts of many of his friends and colleagues:

I long ago came to the conclusion that there is one, and only one way of bringing about a proper government in this city of bedevilled finance and maladministration. My idea is the confidential creation by a dozen of our best citizens of a system of government; then an indignation meeting of citizens at which this system would be passed and approved; followed by a petition presenting the system to the Premier of the Province to be signed by every real estate owner in Montreal. The affairs of Montreal cannot be handled by thirty Aldermen, twenty-nine of whom are ignorant, and many with a hazy interpretation of one of the most important of the Ten Commandments. It is idle for Montrealers to say that we can't have reform in Montreal because two-thirds of the citizens are French. If the remaining one-third British, with such decent French as would join them, would work together, reform would come. If I were a free man, I would be glad to take on the task myself. Montreal has the largest debt per capita of any city in the world, and in most respects has the least to represent such debts.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶² See Michel Gauvin, "The Reformer and the Machine: Montreal Civic Politics from Raymond Préfontaine to Médéric Martin," *Journal of Canadian Studies*, Vol. 13, No. 2, Summer 1978, p. 17, Alan Gordon, "Ward Heelers and Honest Men: Urban Québécois Culture and the Montreal Reform of 1909," *Urban History Review*, p. 21, and P.F.W. Rutherford, introduction to Herbert Ames, *The City Below the Hill* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press), pp. viii-ix.

¹⁶³ Médéric Martin (1869-1946) was born in Montreal. A cigar manufacturer by profession, he was elected mayor of Montreal in 1914, a position he held until 1924. In 1926 he was re-elected for another two years. Martin was also a provincial Liberal member of parliament. See <http://www.assnat.qc.ca/fra/membres/notices/m-n/martme.htm>, cited January 5, 2006, and C.V. Marsolais et al. *Histoire des maires de Montréal*.

¹⁶⁴ MCFP, file #20, Sir Frederick Williams-Taylor to DRM, January 26, 1918.

Sir Frederick remained a citizen of the Golden Square Mile for many years, but it was opinions such as these that drove many wealthy, English-speaking Montrealers, including David McCord, to seek greener spaces and better managerial practices in the more agreeable 'Saxon' environment of Westmount.¹⁶⁵ Although McCord never abandoned his Montreal home on Côte-des-Neiges Road, he did shift much of his investment in this property by selling or exchanging large chunks of it for revenue-producing real-estate in Westmount. For men like Williams-Taylor and McCord, Westmount remained the last refuge of reform principles on the island. It was the physical manifestation of their desire for effective and honest government in an Anglo, upper class, garden city setting. The defeat of reform politics in Montreal only intensified the resolve of Westmount to remain outside Montreal's orbit. As John Bryce has remarked, "As in many North American cities, the battle for urban reform was not won in the inner city, but the 'suburban solution' remained for the business elite."¹⁶⁶

VI

It was announced yesterday afternoon following the meeting of Governors of McGill University that the University had been the recipient of a long planned benefaction in the presentation by Mr. David McCord, Temple Grove, of his remarkable collection of historical articles, works of art and other almost priceless relics illustrative of the history, art and social life of Canada and the British Empire during a long period of time.¹⁶⁷

Eleven years had past since McCord sent a letter to Greenshields offering his collection to McGill. In those eleven years a world war had been fought that killed more people than all previous wars put together, David McCord's sister Jane had died, so too had his old friend Father Wood and Sir William Osler who had allowed his name to be used in association with McCord's museum project, and 'good' hardworking Charles Gould, whose sudden death came just days after the official announcement. Even Sir William Peterson had moved on. Montreal in

¹⁶⁵ Samuel Grove described Westmount as the embodiment of "Anglo-Saxon ideals" in *Westmount News*, 'Local Faint-Hearts', February 29, 1908, p. 1.

¹⁶⁶ John Stephen Bryce, "The Making of Westmount, Quebec, 1870-1929: A Study of Landscape and Community Construction," M.A. Geography, McGill University, 1990, p. 49.

¹⁶⁷ *The Montreal Gazette*, July 26, 1919, p. 5.

1919 was not the same place it had been in 1908. The world had lost its innocence and so too had McCord.

The conflicts that characterized the negotiations between McCord and McGill University did not disappear after the signing. McGill had promised to cover the costs involved in displaying and safeguarding the collection, but when the administration proved reluctant to make good on their promises, pleading budgetary constraints, work on the museum was brought to a halt once again.¹⁶⁸ McCord retaliated by threatening to cancel his endowment of the collection, a condition on which the University's acceptance had hinged. Calmer voices eventually prevailed and by the winter of 1920 objects began to trickle slowly./ over the threshold of the former Joseph House. In May 1920, McCord wrote of his change of heart to Sir Vincent Meredith:

...as I informed you I made another Will. Subsequently feeling that the punishment was too great as affecting the future of McGill, notwithstanding the rudeness I have met with, I have restored a bequest of at least a quarter of a million, and I know that this information will afford you pleasure. I have never lived for myself, and cannot now expect to be here long, but the absence alike of perspective and the amenities of life, which we would have expected would have found a place in a University. The fact ought to strike that this National Museum will be the only building on the grounds the maintenance of which will be kept at the high level I leave it without taxing the funds of the University.¹⁶⁹

Why did McCord persist in trying to get McGill to sponsor his museum when doing so caused him so much frustration and, in the end, cost him his health? Part of the explanation lies, I suspect, in memory. McGill University, like Temple Grove at the top of Côte-des-Neiges hill, was another one of McCord's significant memory places. McCord's relationship with McGill spanned a lifetime – a lifetime of memories that had institutional and personal, social and psychological dimensions. Beginning with his baptism, McCord's life followed a path that ran parallel to and often intersected with that of the University. In April of 1844, McCord was baptised by the Anglican Bishop, Dr. John Bethune, who

¹⁶⁸ MCFP, file #2053, Correspondence Percy Nobbs and DRM.

¹⁶⁹ MCFP, file #2053, DRM to Sir Vincent Meredith, May 31, 1920.

was also the Principal of McGill at the time.¹⁷⁰ As an undergraduate McCord was a witness to and a participant in the changes brought by Sir William Dawson, who transformed McGill from a small college of only a handful of students to a respected institution of higher learning. During the Peterson years, when McCord was trying to give away his collection to the University, McGill took on the physical shape and developed the reputation it enjoys today. By the time McCord left his estate to McGill in 1930, the University's survival was no longer an issue. McGill and McCord had arrived.

David McCord's choice of McGill for his undergraduate studies was not an obvious one. His father, John Samuel, had turned his back on McGill despite its proximity to Temple Grove, after John Bethune failed in his attempt to make it an Anglican institution. Bethune's tenure as principal of McGill was marked by an important struggle to overturn the college's already established tradition of liberalism and make McGill an Anglican institution.¹⁷¹ Already a circuit judge in the Eastern Townships, John Samuel turned his attention instead to Bishop's College, an Anglican institution of High Church persuasion, where he eventually became chancellor. David McCord knew Bishop's through his father, but chose the more liberal and secular McGill instead.

David McCord received his first degree, a Bachelor of Arts, in 1863. In his class picture he and his fellow students are grouped around a table and a lectern in serious academic repose reminiscent of many similar photos found in the Notman Collection. What is outstanding about this particular photo, however, is the contrast it affords between the demeanour of one student, David McCord, and his much older looking and more grim-faced classmates. Looking directly into the camera, the beginnings of a smirk playing on his lips, David McCord lies sprawled on a chair, his degree slung casually over one shoulder. Beardless and with neatly cropped hair, he looks more like a teenager from *American Bandstand*

¹⁷⁰ John Bethune, rector of the Parish of Montreal, was McGill University's second principal and governor (1835-1846). Before coming to McGill, he helped establish a national school, an orphanage, and the Montreal General Hospital. Under his leadership the first buildings were erected on campus. See Stanley Brice Frost, *McGill University for the Advancement of Learning, Vol. I* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1980), pp. 66, 69-99.

¹⁷¹ Ibid, pp. 86-87.

than one of those pious youths featured in Charles Kingsley's novels. Despite McCord's air of cultivated indifference to the weightiness of the occasion, his academic record suggests a committed student – a prizewinner in moral philosophy, essay writing, and snow shoeing. In a letter written some forty years later, college friend Archibald Duff provides the following reminiscences of the youthful McCord:

How I remember one sight of you especially. It was the College Snow Shoe Races. And there was one in Cap & Gown And – so funny – you ran it: And, hurrah, You won it! I seem _____ to see your red & black robed [figure] – tearing away round & then in – first! How we shouted. Yes, I remember not a few deeds of yours, one when you silenced a wrong, and lifted the manliness of the men up, up: I have never forgotten that! But how could you otherwise, for I remember your Father – white haired in robes, in the little Court in Cowansville, the first judge I had ever seen. So he became an Ideal, a concept of the first & last of the Judges for me. Yes, it is all so beautiful.¹⁷²

The photograph, a silver cup for winning the snowshoe race, and his academic record are the only tangible remains of McCord's passage through McGill – a poor collection for someone whose life was dedicated to collecting other people's memorabilia.

McCord arrived at McGill just as the first changes to the physical surroundings and the curriculum, initiatives of the new principal John William Dawson, were beginning to take effect. When Dawson took up residence in the fall of 1855, his first impressions were of a college

...represented by two blocks of unfurnished and partly ruinous buildings, standing amidst a wilderness of excavators' and masons' rubbish, overgrown with weeds and bushes. The grounds were unfenced, and pastured at will by herds of cattle, which not only cropped the grass, but browsed on the shrubs, leaving unhurt only one great elm, which still stands as 'the founder's tree'.... The only access from town was by a circuitous and ungraded cart-track, almost impassable at night. The buildings had been abandoned by the new Board [of Governors] and the classes of the Faculty of Arts were held in the upper storey of a brick building, the lower part of which was occupied by the High School.¹⁷³

¹⁷² MCFP, file #1803, letter from Archibald Duff, Manningham, England to DRM, September 9, 1905.

¹⁷³ Stanley Brice Frost, *McGill University for the Advancement of Learning*, Vol. I, pp. 198-200.

In 1859, when McCord arrived on campus, McGill had already begun its metamorphosis from the third-rate college associated with the Bethune years to the most important institution of higher learning in Canada. Under Dawson's early leadership, the grounds were replanted with trees, the Arts faculty was returned to the main building on campus from the corner of Dorchester and University Streets, and new buildings were planned.

During his thirty-eight years as McGill's chief administrator, research scientist, and gifted teacher, Dawson accumulated a long list of accolades.¹⁷⁴ Many, including large numbers of his students, saw him as a heroic figure, larger than life in his day-to-day dealings with people, due to his immense vitality which he rooted in an unshakable spiritual belief. Dawson came to personify the ideal type of 'McGill Man': Protestant, middle-class, hardworking, selfless, chivalrous in work and play, with a masculinity that did not ignore the body but sought to elevate the mind. His legendary capacity for work was achieved by following the same maxim he set before his undergraduates: "When you are wearied with one kind of study or work, it is often a much greater relief to turn to another of a different character than to sink into absolute repose."¹⁷⁵ This was the argument he used to dissuade undergraduates from using summer holidays as a break from college studies. Francis Shepherd, a medical student who went on to become Dean of McGill's Faculty of Medicine, wrote of his former teacher: "He was the cleverest lecturer I ever heard. One felt that his soul was in his work and there was no excuse for not understanding him; he not only lectured clearly and well, but he was most interesting. ... Sir William Dawson always impressed me as a big man; he had much dignity yet was not difficult of access – was always ready to help the student... and many of us received much inspiration from intimate contact with him for he was a great man."¹⁷⁶

It was as a teacher and surrogate father figure that Dawson made the greatest impression on the young McCord, and his teaching was not restricted to the classroom. As an Arts undergraduate, the only course McCord was obliged to

¹⁷⁴ Ibid, p. 229.

¹⁷⁵ Edgar Collard, *Oldest McGill* (Toronto: 1946), p. 155.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid, pp. 122-23.

take with Dawson was fourth-year Natural History.¹⁷⁷ A welcome opportunity no doubt, for McCord was already an avid naturalist, seeking specimens on excursions with his father in and around Montreal Island. Dawson's mentorship continued outside the classroom: a year after McCord graduated from McGill he gave a paper to the Canadian Natural History Society 'On Canadian ferns, their varieties and habitats'. In 1865, the year his father died, David McCord became a full member in the Society, which John Samuel McCord had helped found, and over which Dawson now presided. The passage of time did not diminish McCord's memory of Dawson as a great man, and when it came time to organize the first exhibition at the McCord Museum, Sir William Dawson's convocation robe and related objects were on prominent display in the McGill Room.

In retrospect, it may have been Dawson's teaching style which imprinted itself most on McCord's imagination.¹⁷⁸ This was the age of the popular lecture as a form of entertainment. Dawson the educator used this approach, punctuating his lectures with an assortment of ingenious visual aids. 'Magic lantern' slides, large format charts, geological maps that revealed their stratifications through a system of hinged layers, and the all important 'specimen' were all called upon to provide visual support for his arguments.¹⁷⁹ Visits to the McGill Museum or to a geological site off campus were preferred by Dawson as they brought the points he was trying to make literally to hand. An ability to illustrate words with visual examples was an early part of any natural historian's training, but Dawson, who from all accounts was a master of this art, could not have avoided impressing young undergraduates, including McCord, with his performances. Years later, when McCord's life work became documenting the Canadian past, the influence of his early training in the inventory sciences showed in the approach he took to history, that of a collector. For natural historians including McCord, specimens were never just illustrations of an idea but were physical manifestations of the idea itself – a scientific idea that was also a gift of the Creator. This in part may

¹⁷⁷ Stanley Brice Frost, *McGill University for the Advancement of Learning*, Vol. I, p. 185.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid, p. 234.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

explain McCord's own peculiar relationship to the historical artifacts to which he attached a transcendent quality.¹⁸⁰

When Dawson arrived at McGill, the university museum collections consisted of one fossil.¹⁸¹ For a palaeontologist trained at the University of Edinburgh and used to working with a natural history collection amassed over half a century, this was a case of serious intellectual impoverishment. In the nineteenth century, academic reputations in science were measured by the size of a professor's collection.¹⁸² When the Redpath Museum of Natural History opened in 1882, it was Dawson's crowning glory. Built to commemorate Dawson's twenty-five years as McGill's principal, the museum housed one of the most important collections in the country. McCord took note.

To promote greater contact outside the classroom, Dawson invited students to special evenings presided over by the Principal and Mrs. Dawson at their home in the east wing of the university. Printed invitations were sent out to the years in rotation requesting their presence for eight o'clock. The small enrolment (in the early 1860s there were no more than fifty students at McGill), as well as participation of the Dawson children, would have softened the formality of these occasions, providing an atmosphere that was more familial and less regulated by the strict conventions which characterized most social interactions of the time:

These gatherings usually included a short recitation or address on some interesting topic, a few musical numbers, and refreshments. There would also be a collection of exhibits prepared by Sir William – a microscope through which living animalcules could be seen, ferns preserved in slate rocks as though they had been pressed between leaves of stone, photographs of remarkable geological strata. These exhibits were often the occasion for some very pleasant instruction, imparted by Sir William in conversation and informal discussion. When Sir William found a student who could play accompaniments to college songs, he was invited to all the gatherings – five or six a year.¹⁸³

¹⁸⁰ See Carl Berger, *Science, God and Nature in Victorian Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983), pp. 47-48, and Barbara Lawton, *Collected Curios: Missionary Tales from the South Seas* (Montreal, McGill University Libraries, 1994), pp. ix-x.

¹⁸¹ Susan Sheets-Pyenson, p. 55.

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ See Collard, *Oldest McGill*, p. 155.

When McCord was reminiscing about the life of Lady Dawson fifty years later, he evoked with much fondness the memory of those evenings and the contribution she made to them. "They can never forget the evenings at the Principal's, her gentleness and her helpfulness, an influence to inspire, to elevate and lead into the higher side of life and this without bringing into verbal prominence the only true, the only safe anchors on which the storms of life can alone be out-riden. Such was ever in evidence in the life of the Principal's."¹⁸⁴

The 'storms of life', which McCord alludes to in the third person, did not pass him by. It was during the years he was at McGill studying law that his father, sister, and brother died. His comments suggest that the Dawsons might have played the role of surrogate parents at a time when his own family was in crisis. Certainly McCord in later years made the connection between family and university life:

The University is the family of those who have no children in the ordinary sense of the term. Those who have the future of the latter to consider – rarely have university children – Let us honour such foster parents. It were preferable, in alas, too many cases, if of the abundance of the means of even the ordinary father, he permanently handed down his name in a University endowment, instead of embarking his all in the uncertain ventures of the ability of character or judgment of his descendants.¹⁸⁵

No doubt McCord had his own circumstances in mind when he penned these words. Family had long ago taught him the truth of his comment that children were 'uncertain ventures'. Was McCord making a virtue out of necessity, perhaps? By endowing a museum instead of a bloodline, he did succeed in doing what he set out to do, retain control of the family legacy and create historical continuity similar to what a family provides. Had he produced children instead of a collection, his monopoly on interpretation would have eluded him. In effect, by remaining childless, he reserved for himself the last word on the McCords.

McCord's monopoly on interpretation extended beyond the McCord family story. By giving his collection to McGill University, McCord was able to avoid the fate of someone such as William Cloverdale, another important

¹⁸⁴ MCFP, file #CO69-B113-737J, Sir William Dawson.

¹⁸⁵ MCFP, file #2024, Historical notebook, Vol. III, p. 97.

collector of Canadiana, whose collection was divided after his death among two national institutions, Le Musée de la civilisation in Quebec and the National Museum of Civilization in Ottawa.¹⁸⁶ By refusing to allow Laurier to co-opt his work, McCord was able to retain his right to represent himself, to inscribe his own name rather than that of the Canadian nation. The subjective nature of his enterprise, however, was seriously at odds with the universalizing and homogenizing tendencies of national myth making. The idiosyncratic nature of his collecting practices, one purpose of which was to serve autobiographical memory, worked against his desire to present a comprehensive narrative of Canadian national identity. If there could be a McCord myth of Canadian origins – why not a Harvey myth or a Deer myth for that matter?¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁶ See Nathalie Hamel, "La Collection Cloverdale d'histoire canadienne: reflet des préoccupations patrimoniales d'une époque (1929-1949)," unpublished paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Canadian Historical Society, Québec, 2002.

¹⁸⁷ Deer is a Mohawk name common to Kahnawake, a Mohawk community south of Montreal, Q.C.

Appendix I - First Museum Arrangement¹

Pictures

Room A: Indians - Abenaki

Room A: Indians - Micmac

Room A: Indians - Iroquois

Room A: Indians - Misc.

Room B: French Regime and Seven Years' War

Room C: Wolfe

Room D: McCords et al.

Room E: Protestant Spiritual Pioneers

Room F: Roman Catholic Spiritual Pioneers

Room G: American Revolution

Room H: China

Room I: Quebec Prov.

Room J: Artists, Generals, Poets

Room K: Montreal and McGill University

Room L: Arctic

Halls 1 and 2

¹ MCFP, file #2075, "First Museum Arrangement," circa 1920. In the original.

Abenaki Indians - First Museum Arrangement²

B.	Beads (European)	41
	(Wabanaki)	40
	Sorcerer's	33
	Boxes	35, 233
C.	Council House, Pierreville	
	Colielms(sic)	959-59.1
	Credentials	42-42.1
I.	Implements, Knife	412
	Tongs	31
O.	Origin of name	
P.	Powder Horn	958
S.	Scalping	
	Strike a light	39-8.1
U.	Utensil, Drinking cup	34
	Spoon, Wabanaki	32
W.	Weapons, Scalping Knife	36
	Wearing of Feathers	
	Was8mimet(sic)	
L.	Language	
M.	Machine	2660

² MCFP, file #2059, "First Museum Arrangement," circa 1920, "Room A: Indians – Abenaki." In the original.

Iroquois- First Museum Arrangement³

B.	Brant, Chief	
	Genealogy	
	Family	
	Portrait of Portraiture	
C.	Child Life	293
	Costume	1551-52
	Breast Plate	184
	Breast Plate	992-92.1
	Leglets, pair	989-89.1
	Armlets, pair	990 -90.1
	Armlets, pair	991 - 91.1
	Squaw's Dress	1087 - 87.1
	Head-dress	168
	Leglets	267
	Cradles	186.87, 207
I.	Inkstand, Jos. Brant	181
M.	Medicine Bag	740
	Necklace	192
	Pagan Rites	170 - 71
	Pine Tree Chief	
	Pottery	
	Scalp	176
	Stedman Deed of Sale	1875 - 75.1
T.	Tecumseh	435 - 43
	Tecumseh	
	Treaties (Abenaki - Iroquois)	997 - 97.3
W.	Hatchet	998
	cont.	

³ MCFP, file #2061, "First Museum Arrangement," circa 1920, "Room A: Iroquois." In the original.

	Weapons, Scalping Knife`	1890
	Papoose and Cradle 1923	293 - 276 - 200
H.	Head-dress	1074
W.	Wampum strings	1899 - 99.4
	Missions	
	Iroquois Kings	1881 - 8
	Indian Kings at Court of Queen Anne	1710
H.	Hochelaga - Plan of Fortified Oneida Town	
	Resembling Hochelaga	
C.	Crouse Indian Collection, origin of	2 pp

Mic-Mac⁴

A.	Art	
B.	Basket (Lady Falkland)	1
	(very small)	26-30
	Beads, strings of	52-54
	string of	962
	rose petals	90 - 90.1
	string of	
	Beadwork	64
C.	Costumes, Armlet	196
	Gorget	197
	Captain's Chapel Suit	87 - 87.5
	Head-dress	86
	Head-dress (S. Toney)	96
	Squaw's	65
	War Dance	92 - 92.13
	War Dance	122 - 122.6
	Crucifix	3
D.	Design	20
G.	Games, Gambling	70 - 70.6, 78, 68 - 68.60
	Dice Box	107
	Sticks	73.10 - 73.40
	Interpretation	
	Native Interpretation	
	Gorget	197
	Group of	1349
I.	Implements, Basket making	21 - 21.1, 60 -61, 62

⁴ MCFP, file #2060, "First Museum Arrangement," circa 1920, "Room A: Mic-Mac." In the original.

cont. Mic-Mac

	Snow-shoe	43-48
	Spear - salmon	15
	Spear - eels	49
	Floats used in fishing	50 - 51
	Harpoon Head	960
	Stone to grind corn	1326
M.	Missions	
	Moose Call	103
N.	Necklaces, Rose Petal	88
	Rose Leaves	
O.	Ornaments Brooch	1381
	Ring	8
	Moccasin	1522 - 32.1, 105
P.	Pipes	55, 63
	Pouches	1553 - 54
	Porcupine Work	106, 113
	Hearts	117 - 18
	Punk	1580-82
S.	Squaw's portrait	1824
T.	Tinder-bag	4 - 4.5
	Toys, Canoe	105
T.	Canoe and Doll	95 - 95.1
	Totem	
W.	Weapons, Massacre of Halifax	
	Powder Horn	5
	Stone	84
	War Club	13
	War Club	14
cont Mic-Mac		
	Wigwam	1377

C.	Costume, Moccasins	1822 - 23.1
	Moccasins	22 - 22.1
B.	Book owned by Rev. Vroom	
B.	Bible	2643
C.	Canoes	

Protestant Spiritual Pioneers - First Museum Arrangement⁵

A. Anderson, Rev. David	1068, 1102
B. Bethune, Rev. John	
Bishops Canadian	
C. Christ Burch Cathedral	1935
Communion tokens (McLachlan)	
E. Eden, Rev. Robert	1107
F. Field(sic), Rev. Ed	
portrait	1208
certificate	
	2318
Fulford, Rev. F	
H. Horden, Bishop John	2306
I. Inglis, Rev. Charles	1069
M. Mason's Hammer	1217
Mathieson, Rev. Alex	1507
Medley, Archbishop	
Mountain, Rev. G.J.	
S. St. Andrew's Church	
St. Gabriel - Door Handle	2319
Stewart, Bishop Charles Jas	
Stuart, Rev. John	
B. Burrage, Rev. R.R.	5489
St. John's Anglican Church	
Strachan, John, Bishop of Toronto	

⁵ MCFP, file #2066, "First Museum Arrangement," circa 1920, "Room E: Protestant Spiritual Pioneers." In the original.

Roman Catholic Spiritual Pioneers - First Museum Arrangement⁶

B.	Basilica	667
	Bonsecours Church	653
	Cross	1936-7
F	Flagellation Cords	1269
G	Garnier, Chas	
	Garnier, Julien	1545
	Gueslis, F.V. de	1540
I	Incarnation, M. de l"	985
	portrait	912
J	Jesuit Fathers	286
	Martyrs	2208-10
L	Laval de M. F. X. de	1317
M	Mason's Hamer	1143
	L. & L.J. Lamontagne	1144-45
	McDonell, Bishop A.	392
	Mornay, L.F.D. de	
N	Notre Dame - Belfry, 1843	
	railings, 1692	
O	Olier, J.J.	
R	R.C. Clergy List	1550
S	Seminary	660, 661, 662, 664, 666
	Sillery, J. Est at	657
	Hinge of Church	986
W	Window-guards	2336-7
N	Neuvill, J.B. de	
M	Massé, Father Ennemond, S.J.	

cont Spiritual Pioneers

⁶ MCFP, file #2067, "First Museum Arrangement," circa 1920, "Room F: Roman Catholic Spiritual Pioneers." In the original.

J	Jesuit Letter	4628
H	Hotel Dieu, Montreal, relics	
P	Piquet, Father Confessional, Oka, Que	
C	The Calvary, Oka, Que	
N	Notre Dame, the Parish Church of	
J	Jesuit Church, Quebec	
	Carving from the old	5258
P	Parish Church, Montreal, 1692	
R	Recollet Church, Montreal	
W	Wood Carving	

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