

Stanley B. Frost

The Abbotts of McGill

The stories of three members of the Abbott family that follow are as various in their manner of surprise as they are in their matter. We learn salutary things about the precarious and comic-opera way in which things are apt to be managed in the early stages of what later may become a mighty and admired institution. There is the story of a man beginning with qualifications that would fail to get him tenure today, and emerging in turn as Dean of Law, Mayor of Montreal, and Prime Minister of Canada. We hear with astonishment of certain luridly melodramatic events that determined the upbringing of one of the notable personalities of the golden age of McGill, a woman remembered with affection by many. Each story throws light in its novel way both on McGill and on the enterprise of education.

From time to time, in the life of any institution, outstanding personalities arise and become significant in their own days and a legend thereafter. Occasionally a second generation continues the story, after the fashion of the Bishops Mountain of Quebec, Jacob and George Jehoshaphat, or the Bishops Inglis of Nova Scotia, Charles and John. It is not often, outside of dynastic systems, that one can point to three such generations. But this is the case with the Abbotts of McGill, and all three generations have a story well worth the telling.

The story of this family begins with two brothers, both clergymen of the Church of England. The elder was Joseph Abbott, a graduate of the University of Aberdeen, and a parish priest in Norfolk, who came to Canada in 1818 and was sent as a missionary to the settlement of St. Andrews on the north shore of the Ottawa River. He brought out his younger brother, William, who taught school at St. Andrews and studied theology under Joseph. In 1824 William was ordained and sent as a missionary to Yamaska Mountain. Two years later he was back at St. Andrews, having exchanged posts with Joseph, and he continued as Rector of St. Andrews until he died thirty-three years later. It has been suggested that William found Yamaska too demanding, and that Joseph generously surrendered the more congenial position to the younger brother of whom he had taken care from the time he arrived in Canada. At any rate, Joseph went to Yamaska, where he stayed for five years. While he was there he was visited by Bishop Jacob Moun-

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tain, who suggested that he should change its name to Abbotsford. This he did, but he spelt the name with one 't', so that the direct reference is to the home of Sir Walter Scott and the reference to himself is only a play on words. The village, incidentally, is one of those Eastern Township settlements which have had a further change of name, and it is now called St. Paul d'Abbotsford.

Joseph Abbott

In 1830 Joseph moved back to Grenville, ten miles west of St. Andrews, and became Rector of a new parish there, where he stayed until his retirement from parish work. The family story we are to follow is all related to this same stretch of country west of the Lac des Deux Montagnes and north of the Ottawa River. During the eighteen-twenties and eighteen-thirties the elder brother, Joseph, was not only a missionary and parish priest. He also achieved a name for himself as an agricultural pioneer and as an author by writing a number of pieces for a Quebec newspaper called the *Mercury*. These articles were so well thought of that they were reprinted in pamphlet form in Montreal in 1843, and a copy of this rare pamphlet is to be found in McGill's Lande Canadiana Collection. The articles had two purposes: first to give practical foreknowledge to immigrants to Canada of the conditions they might expect when they arrived here; and secondly, to teach the best methods for the new settlers to employ in seeking to gain a livelihood from their farms.

In the same year that he published the articles, Joseph Abbott came very importantly into the McGill story. He and his brother William had in fact been among the clergy present fourteen years earlier at the inauguration of McGill College on 24 June 1829, when the Montreal Medical Institution was formally 'engrafted' on to McGill College and became its sole teaching Faculty. But thereafter the Abbotts had nothing to do with the enterprise until 1843 when, with the first buildings newly erected, and with the redoubtable John Bethune, Rector of Montreal, as Principal, the College was about to open its doors to its first Arts students. At that time, Joseph Abbott was appointed by the Governors to the conjoint offices of Bursar, Registrar, and Secretary. In this capacity he was assigned a suite of rooms in the Wing, as it was then called, or Dawson Hall as it is now known, and this meant that he became a continual presence in the College for the next nine years.

In 1846, three years after the opening, Principal John Bethune was 'disapproved' by the Crown and had to go, but Joseph Abbott as Bursar, Registrar, and Secretary stayed on. Abbott was a High Church Tory in religion and politics, and while Bethune was in office, he had been the staunch supporter of the Principal's attempts to stamp an indelible Church of England character on McGill, and long after Bethune's departure he tried to maintain the struggle. He was in an advantageous position to do so, for he attracted offices with a facility

reminiscent of Pooh-Bah in *The Mikado*. To his former three offices there was added in 1846 a new one, that of Chaplain, and this made him responsible for conducting morning and evening chapel, which students were expected to attend in black gowns on ordinary days and white surplices on sabbaths and festivals. A little later he was appointed the first College Librarian, and when Bethune quarreled with the Vice-Principal, F. J. Lundy, and summarily dismissed him, Abbott was also appointed Acting Vice-Principal. The next year he resigned as Vice-Principal, but was, by way of compensation as it were, appointed Lecturer in History and Geography. Being nothing if not versatile, he was in 1849 also teaching Logic. We know that, because one of his students, Brown Chamberlin, wrote home to his sister: "Logic is in itself mighty dry and uninteresting, and with Mr. Abbott for Lecturer it is doubly so."

In his early McGill years, Joseph wrote an autobiographical novel entitled: *Philip Musgrave, or the Memoirs of a Church of England Missionary in the British North American Colonies*. This was published by John Murray in London in 1846, and was one of the first Canadian writings to achieve a considerable circulation in Britain. Like his previous articles, the novel had the secondary motive of giving prospective emigrants to Canada some understanding of the country and of the experiences it had to offer, and it therefore served a real need in the mid-nineteenth century. It also conferred upon Joseph Abbott yet another distinction, for with this novel he became the first member of the McGill staff to achieve publication and an international reputation as an author.

As Secretary of the College, Joseph Abbott was also Secretary to the Board of Governors, but since the effective Board consisted only of Principal Bethune and Chief Justice Vallières de St. Réal, he had only to record their decisions at their infrequent meetings. Nevertheless, he very early asked permission to employ a deputy, and from September 1843 to September 1845, many of the Minutes were written up by this person, about whom we shall have more to say later on. But Abbott's major role, even while Bethune was still in office, was to act as Bursar, that is, to be Treasurer of the College and to keep the College books. It will be recalled that at this time the Royal Institution for the Advancement of Learning was a separate body located in Quebec City, a hundred and eighty very difficult miles away, and that the Board of the Royal Institution had control of the McGill endowment. The College was always asking the Board for money and the Board just as regularly responded by asking for a properly kept set of accounts, and this, as soon became painfully obvious, was what the Bursar could not produce.

When the College had been operating eighteen months only, Bethune and Abbott between them had managed to run up debts representing approximately three years' income from the McGill Funds. When some of the tradesmen who had supplied furniture and other

goods began to threaten lawsuits, and Lundy appealed to the Board of the Royal Institution against his dismissal, the Members decided that the time had come to employ their legal powers as Visitors to the College and force an examination of the administration of the College and particularly of its accounts. Their Report, submitted to the Governor General in 1845, refers scathingly to Joseph Abbott's abilities as financial officer:

The regular expenditure for the College Establishment in salaries and contingent charges is twofold of the income applicable to it; and the Governors have contracted a debt of £1,550 in opening the College, the various items of which expenditure appeared to the Board to be on a scale of extravagance and wastefulness entirely unsuitable to the pecuniary resources of the Institution . . . The Bursar is the Rev^d Mr. Abbott, who has a Salary of £100 a year, and is permitted to do his duty by Deputy. He does not, he says, understand accounts; nor do those of his Deputy appear to be regularly and correctly kept.

To its Report, the Board attached a number of recommendations, one of which was "to dispense with the office of Bursar, and require the nowise onerous duties thereof to be performed by some of the Resident Officers of the College."

But Joseph Abbott was not so easily disposed of. The Principal and the Bursar replied to the criticism contained in the Visitation Report by promoting a Bill in the Legislature to abolish the Royal Institution and transfer all its powers to the Governors of McGill College. Bethune travelled from Montreal to Kingston to promote this Bill in the Legislature in 1843 and 1844, and each time he was defeated by the early adjournment of the House. However, in 1845 he was successful in having the Bill presented. The Legislative Assembly appointed a Committee to consider the matter and after discussion recommended, not that the Royal Institution should be abolished but that it should be reformed with Montreal members. This was done, and it appeared that Bethune and Abbott had won a considerable victory.

But the new Board had no sooner begun to grasp the seriousness of the financial situation than they too demanded an examination of the College accounts. It was quickly found that the hapless Bursar did not in fact have any clear idea as to whom he had paid monies, or against what accounts, nor did he know what debts were still owing. The Minute of the decision of the 1847 Board on this point runs as follows:

Perceiving however that these [accounts] comprehending a period of a full four years, exhibited no sign of a former audit . . . it was deemed expedient that the College accounts should be placed in the hands of a Professional Accountant for systematic examination and report.

When the report was received, the Board came to the same conclusion as their predecessors and they expressed it with a fine sense of irony:

The Committee desire it to be distinctly understood that they freely and fully absolve Mr. Abbott from any intention of keeping his books in the disorderly and unsatisfactory state in which they have been found, evils which seem to have arisen wholly from his unacquaintance with the true nature and correct practice of accounts.

Like their predecessors they recommend that his service be dispensed with, and say that his duties, which they describe as little more than nominal, should be transferred to the Vice-Principal — who, however, should receive a reduction rather than an increase in salary.

But the Board of the Royal Institution were not at this stage the Governors of McGill, and while they could recommend, they could not enforce. The Board could fulminate but it could not fire, and the Reverend Joseph gave evidence of remarkable staying power. Five years later, he was still in his many offices, but in that year, 1852, the Charter of McGill College was amended, and the members of the Board of the Royal Institution for the Advancement of Learning were appointed to be also the Board of Governors of the University of McGill College. On 30 August 1852 they met for the first time in their new capacity, and the first item of business on the agenda was to accept the resignation of Joseph Abbott from all his positions. So ended the significant but hardly successful career of McGill's first financial officer. It has to be said of Joseph Abbott that he was much better as a writer, farmer, and parish priest than as a university administrator. He continued his ministry until his death in Montreal in 1863.

John Abbott

We said that in two of his capacities, Joseph Abbott employed a deputy. We know who the deputy secretary was, for he often signs the Minutes 'Acting Secretary, J.J.C. Abbott,' and when Joseph Abbott was questioned as to the identity of the unsatisfactory deputy he had employed in his office of Bursar, he replied "My son." In this rather unfortunate manner, therefore, we are introduced to the second Abbott generation. John Joseph Caldwell Abbott was born at St. Andrews in 1821, three years after Joseph had become Rector of that parish. When McGill College opened in 1843 he was twenty-two years old, and one week after the opening ceremonies he matriculated as a student, presumably in the first year of the Arts program. He had been in Montreal for some five years in various commercial capacities but they must have been very junior, for it is said that in later years he "spoke with authority of selling calico, how apples were packed and other intricacies of trade." But the life of a student in McGill College came hard to a young man who had known the free life of the City,

and after a year or so he left McGill to continue his commercial activities. He is said to have worked in a general store in Deseronto and to have engaged in buying grain in Oshawa.

In 1845 he returned to Montreal, having decided to become a lawyer. He was articled to the firm of Meredith and Bethune — the Meredith being the elder brother of Edmund Allen Meredith, who had succeeded John Bethune as Principal of McGill, and the Bethune being Strachan Bethune, John Bethune's son. In 1847, Abbott was granted his commission as an advocate, and two years later he married Mary Bethune, John Bethune's daughter. At the same time he entered into partnership with William Badgley, who was also the first Professor of Law at McGill College, and whose brother, Francis, was a prominent physician and a member of McGill's Faculty of Medicine. Things moved in very tight little circles in those days.

In the year 1853, the Board of Governors decided to support William Badgley with two lecturers and to appoint him as Dean of a new Faculty of Law. Only one year previously they had at long last got rid of Joseph Abbott, but they appear to have harboured no animus against the family, or against the former Deputy Bursar and Acting Secretary of the College, for when Badgley proposed as one of the lecturers his young partner J. J. C. Abbott, they agreed to the appointment. It was not necessary in those days to have a degree to practice law, and John Abbott had never graduated. However, it looked better for a Lecturer in Law to have a degree, so Abbott fulfilled the formalities (which, we may suspect, his senior partner arranged to be not very demanding) and was awarded the B.C.L. degree after having been appointed to the teaching staff.

This appointment renewed the association of the Abbott family with McGill, and it was an association which was to continue all through the career of the future Prime Minister. At first he was told that his salary would be 'the subject of future consideration,' but Professor Badgley and his two colleagues must have performed fairly well that year because at its end the Board of Governors voted them each £50, with an expression of regret that the Board could not as yet assign a fixed salary to these appointments. In July the following year, the three men received the same sum, but then Mr. Justice Badgley resigned and both John Abbott and F. W. Torrance were promoted to the rank of Professor. At the same time John Abbott was named Dean of the Faculty of Law, which now boasted a staff of four members.

Dean Abbott was at first appointed to the Professorship of Commercial and Criminal Law, but in 1857 he dropped the Criminal part of his assignment and concentrated on the Commercial aspect. He followed the usual pattern of combining his university duties with a successful practice in Montreal. In 1857 he stood for election to the Legislative Assembly for the county of Argenteuil, where he had been born and brought up. He represented that constituency until 1874.

During those years he prepared and piloted through Parliament the Insolvent Act; he then published a manual which described the Act in great detail, and as a result (and we quote from a contemporary biographical sketch):

Merchants flocked to his office to consult him on a measure which many believed could be explained by no one else, and this formed the nucleus of a practice which has increased from that day to this, to enormous proportions. He is still regarded as the ablest commercial lawyer in the Province of Quebec.

In 1867 an entry in the first Minute Book of the Faculty of Law records an application by Dean Abbott for his doctorate in Law. The Minute says that "his application was considered together with his thesis and it was resolved . . . that the degree of D.C.L. . . . be granted." Unfortunately the thesis seems not to have survived.

Some years earlier Abbott had bought the Montreal and Bytown Railway. From this time on he became a powerful supporter of a scheme to link Montreal by rail with the West Coast and he helped Sir Hugh Allan to form the Canadian Pacific Company, which won the contract from the Canadian Government to undertake the task. He was deeply implicated in the subsequent Canadian Pacific scandal, since it was his confidential clerk who supplied the incriminating evidence to the members of the Parliamentary opposition. The politicians who extracted campaign contributions from the reluctant railway promoters did so through his office, but his own involvement seems to have been simply that of a go-between. Nevertheless, the scandal not only brought down Sir John A. Macdonald's Government but it also cost John Abbott his seat in the subsequent election. But it did not interfere with his Deanship at McGill, or with the lucrative exercise of his profession in Montreal. When Macdonald returned to power, Abbot handled the relations between the C.P.R. and the Government, and from that time until the railroad was completed, John Abbott was active in all the Company's transactions and management. He prepared, almost wholly in his own handwriting, the contract between the Government of Canada and the Canadian Pacific Railway Company, and it was said by Sir Edward Beatty in 1936 that the contract was not only an important document in Canadian history, but also one of the finest pieces of accurate drafting since Confederation.

In all this press of business, John Abbott continued as Professor of Commercial Law and Dean of the Faculty until he regained his seat in the House in 1878, but two years later he resigned. It has to be recognized that his long tenure as Dean (twenty-five years) gave the McGill Law School a distinction which greatly enhanced its reputation not only in Quebec but throughout all of eastern Canada. But how much actual lecturing he did is difficult to ascertain, and the development of the teaching of Law at McGill undoubtedly suffered from lack of full-time professors and particularly from lack of a full-

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time Dean. That fault could not be corrected until 1890, when the Faculty received a handsome endowment from William Macdonald in the amount of \$150,000.00 However, Abbott stood in such high esteem with the university that shortly before he resigned his academic positions he was made a member of the Board of Governors, and, in that office, John Abbott continued his connection with the university even when he succeeded Sir John A. Macdonald as Prime Minister of Canada. It was, indeed, an association which he maintained until his death, which occurred in 1893, just fifty years after his father Joseph first became Bursar.

John Abbott may have made a shaky start at McGill as his father's deputy Bursar, but he became one of Canada's outstanding personalities. As a lawyer, as an academic, as the legal brains behind the C.P.R., as an outstanding Mayor of Montreal, and as Prime Minister of Canada, Sir John well deserves to be remembered. He was also, like his father before him, a successful dairy-herd breeder, and it is appropriate that the College named for him should stand on the Macdonald estate at Ste. Anne de Bellevue in close association with McGill's Faculty of Agriculture.

But the Abbott family had not finished making its mark at McGill, and indeed its richest contribution was yet to come.

William's granddaughter

It will be recalled that William Abbott, Rector of the Parish of St. Andrews, was the brother of Joseph Abbott, the first Registrar and Bursar of McGill College, and so the uncle of John. But for most people William's greatest claim to fame is that he was the grandfather of Maude Abbott, Curator of the McGill Medical Museum and an international authority on congenital diseases of the heart. Between William and his granddaughter, however, lies a tragic story which explains how her name came to be Abbott, and how she must be counted among the Abbotts of McGill.

While on a visit to England William married Frances Mary Smith, who traced her descent to the family of the Marquis of Hertford, so she had some pretensions of aristocracy. Certainly every record we have of this lady speaks of her in the most kindly and appreciative tones. The couple had eight children all of whom predeceased their mother. She was left to raise a stained glass window to their memory and that of her husband in the Parish Church of St. Andrews. Only one daughter of that whole family reached maturity, so that the tragic note is sounded early in this part of our story.

The daughter who survived infancy was also called Frances: Frances Elizabeth Seymour Abbott. 'Seymour' was the name of the Hertford family. She married a young clergyman named Jeremie Babin,

who came from a French-speaking family in which there were three brothers. They all attended Bishop's College in Lennoxville and they all had biblical names: Jeremie, Job, and Hosea. Their mother died and the father remarried and went off with the new wife, leaving the eldest, Jeremie, to rear the younger children. Among them was a girl, a helpless cripple named Mary. Job at first looked after Mary, while Jeremie became the priest in charge of the Anglican congregation of the little town of Buckingham, some forty or fifty miles from St. Andrews further along the north shore of the Ottawa River, and some three or four miles up a small Laurentian river called la Rivière du Lièvre. Here he and his wife Frances lived happily for fifteen months, until late one night in January 1866 his brother Job unexpectedly turned up at the parsonage with Mary, the cripple girl, on a sleigh. He had also brought her wheelchair and other possessions, with the obvious intention of leaving her in Jeremie's care. There was said to have been a furious quarrel between the two brothers, though the servant girl who lived at the Rectory and later testified to these events could not understand what was said, because the brothers spoke to each other in French. Finally, however, poor Mary was taken in out of the cold and installed on the upper floor of the parsonage. Here she is said to have been kindly treated by both the clergyman and his wife, but the servant girl was told not to let anyone in the town know of her presence.

The murder of Mary Babin

Three months later, one dark night in April, the servant girl was told to go home to see her family and spend the night there and not return until the next day. This was a most unusual thing to happen. When she returned early the next morning, Mary and her chair and all her few effects had disappeared. Jeremie Babin told the girl that Mary had gone to lodge with someone in Ottawa, and the girl was again told not to mention these matters in the town. However, during the same night the shafts to Jeremie's sleigh had been broken, as if they had received very rough treatment, and the vehicle had to be taken to a carpenter for repair.

Nothing more happened until early in June, when a woman's body which had been trapped beneath the ice of the Lièvre River for many weeks rose to the surface. It appeared that instead of being swept away down stream by the spring flood, the body had been caught by an eddy and thrown against the piers of a bridge, and lodged there. No one knew who the woman was, and so she was buried as an unknown pauper. But then rumours concerning the disappearance of Mary began to circulate. Her existence had not been kept as secret as the parson and his wife had supposed. The body was exhumed, and the servant girl and Jeremie Babin together identified the poor crippled remains as indeed those of his sister. An inquest was held; it lasted from from 9 July until 26 July, and the young clergyman was charged by

the coroner's jury with having murdered his sister by drowning. Seeing that Mary was unable to move by herself, there can be no doubt that the poor girl did not enter the water voluntarily. Someone had taken advantage of some holes in the ice which, it was testified, had appeared in the river during April in a small cove a few hundred yards from the parsonage. That someone, whoever it was, must have pushed the cripple into the river that dark night, thinking no doubt that she would never be seen again.

Jeremie Babin was arrested and held on a charge of murder, but it was not until January 1867 that the trial was held in Aylmer, a few miles west of Hull. As can be imagined, the whole countryside was agog with the case, and hundreds of people flocked into the little town from all the settlements around. Meanwhile, Jeremie Babin's wife had given birth to their first child, but when she and the baby arrived with her mother in Aylmer for the trial, none of the public inns would give them lodging, so strong was the feeling against Babin and his family. The case was extensively reported by the *Ottawa Citizen*, in accounts which were decidedly unfavourable to Babin, and by other papers, including the *Gazette* of Montreal, which, however, took care to be studiously impartial in its very full account of the proceedings. There were character witnesses, including the Bishop of Montreal, in favour of the accused: there was testimony from the servant girl to the kindly attention given to Mary by both the parson and his wife during her stay in their home; there was a lack of evidence directly implicating Jeremie in the crime. On the other hand, the circumstantial evidence was very persuasive. Mary's presence had been kept secret; she disappeared on a night when the servant had been most unusually sent away; the sleigh had evidently been out on some rough errand; there was a very broken and difficult track from the parsonage, well away from other habitations, which led to the cove where the body had almost certainly been thrown into the water.

Moreover, Jeremie's own story was extremely unconvincing. He said that he had paid sixty dollars to a man called Moise Leduc, who came from Ottawa to take his sister into lodgings in that city. But he could only give the most general of descriptions of the man; he did not know his address or usual place of habitation; he said Leduc had produced a written recommendation from his parish priest, but Jeremie had not kept the note nor could he recall the priest's name; he further said he had received a letter from the man ten or twelve days after his sister's departure but he had not kept that letter either. The argument of the defence was that the murderer was this man Moise Leduc, but no one could find him. Two witnesses were indeed produced who were willing to swear that they had known a man of that name in Ottawa, but they also testified that he was of no fixed address, that he was of a violent and dissolute character, and that he had disappeared from his usual haunts some time after April 1866.

The trial lasted four days. It is clear that there was a very strong

local feeling against the Rev^d Mr. Babin and much of the evidence given can be dismissed as nothing more than malicious gossip, but the damning circumstances remained. The judge was carefully impartial in his summing up, and if he suggested any verdict at all, it was 'not guilty for lack of evidence'. After retiring for an hour and a half, the jury gave its verdict for acquittal. The judgment was received with wide-spread dissatisfaction, but it has to be said that the moment Jeremie Babin was released, his wife rushed into his arms. Together they returned to the shelter of Frances Babin's old home in St. Andrews. Evidently the Abbott family believed in Jeremie Babin's innocence.

There were others, however, who did not share that belief, and who would not let the matter rest. Letters and editorials critical of Babin continued to appear in the local newspapers, and in the 18th of February issue of the *Ottawa Citizen*, five weeks after the end of the trial, there appeared a poem entitled 'A Legend of Buckingham Village'. It was signed 'Clarence' and assumed Babin's guilt in no uncertain manner. Its fourteen verses are over-long for quotation in full, but some are very striking. After a description of the turbulent Rivière du Lièvre, the poem continues:

Here is the Buckingham Village
Built on these waters of strife,
Here is where Minister Babin
Stood preaching the Gospel of life.

Was his message all noise like the rapids?
And empty and light as the foam?
Ah! what thought the desolate inmate
Of the still, upper-room of his home?

And the brother stood high in the pulpit,
Up there in the neat village church,
And preached of the pool of Bethesda,
Where the lame man lay in the porch.

Was that cottage home a Bethesda?
Was the porch up the narrow stair?
Was the lonely sister's musings
Made bright by a brother's care?

Who knows, for the chair is empty,
And the impotent girl away.
And night and darkness covered
The deed from the light of day.

Did she struggle for dear existence?
Did the night winds hear her cry?
'Ere the pitiless, surging waters,
Smothered her agony?

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Oh! men may strike hands to hide it,
And join to call evil good,
But as the roar of the waters
Is the cry of our sister's blood.

Even though the young wife and her mother stood firm in their support, there must have been unhappy weeks and months following the trial. Two years later, in 1869, a second child, another girl, was born, but Frances Babin had suffered all she could endure and a few months later she died of pulmonary tuberculosis. Jeremie Babin did not linger long in the North Ottawa country, but took himself off to the United States and disappears from our story, leaving the grandmother, William Abbott's widow, to rear the two little girls.

Maude Abbott

But now the story takes a happier turn. By means of a private bill, Frances Abbott changed the girls' surname to that of their mother's family, and Alice and Maude Abbott had the immense benefit of growing up in a peaceful home, where love and gentle manners and a strong tradition of education and culture were the order of the day. Grandfather William and greatuncle Joseph and cousin John provided a family tradition which could be, and was, allowed to draw a veil over the horrors of the past. It is doubtful if the children were ever aware of it. Maude must have known, in later life, at least the bare facts, but all her accounts of her childhood and youth are tales of confident happiness and of assured relationships. Both girls grew up with an unlimited affection for their one grandparent, who had been mother and father to them both.

Maude Elizabeth Seymour Abbott (she carried forward her mother's names) first entered McGill in 1886. She had been educated at home with her sister and spent only one year in formal schooling. This experience left her impressionable by the privilege of receiving an education and may explain, at least in part, her extraordinary attachment to McGill as her *alma mater*. In later life, in an autobiographical sketch, she commented on the fact that hers was only the third class of women students to enter the university, and continued:

I think perhaps I, who was country-bred, and had not had my fill of school or directed study before I entered Arts, felt our new advantages most acutely of us all. I was literally in love with McGill or so the girls said, and I have never really fallen out of love with her since.

Certainly she tackled her studies with great energy and graduated with the Lord Stanley Gold Medal. She was chosen Valedictorian of her class, and in her autobiography she quotes, without apology or self-deprecation, part of what she remembered herself saying at the Convocation:

The *ego polliceor* that we have just vowed is still vibrating on the air, and can we even dream of ceasing to love and cherish and reverence, of ceasing to keep holy and undefiled, the memory of that University that has made us her children? . . . let our whole future life-work prove, that from our hearts far more than from our lips, arises to our Alma Mater a wish that is a prayer, "Fare well!"

There were no doubt many present that day, even in that more expressive Victorian period, who smiled indulgently over such a girlish outpouring of emotion; but Maude Abbott meant what she said, and when she recalled those words thirty-six years later, her intervening career had remarkably exemplified her devotion and commitment.

There was something else she said that day which was also to prove not ephemeral rhetoric but a sober statement of conviction, and which was to govern her whole development:

As we stand here on the vantage ground of our Graduation day, looking backward on the past and forward over the future, the one supreme thought that comes to us out of the kaleidoscope of memory and hope is that of this mysterious *work*. To what it ultimately tends we know not, but we press forward in it to this, the prize of our high calling. Work is fundamental to the onward march of science; it is at the bottom of every great and good action that was ever done, it underlies the foundation of all true character; and it is the sin of idleness that is to be counted as the deadliest, just because it chokes with stifling pressure of stagnation every noble deed and eventually every holy inspiration.

The language is the bombast of youth, masquerading as the voice of experience — but in 1926 when she was recalling those words, she was in the full flood of a life of unremitting activity and engagement, motivated by the convictions she had expressed as a girl. Those who worked with her knew her as a well-spring of boundless energy, an elemental force, and among a wide circle of colleagues and friends she was aptly termed the "beneficent tornado."

But things did not always go easily for Maude Abbott. As she neared the end of her college days, a friend suggested that she should try to enter the medical profession. She seized upon it with characteristic commitment. When she went home and asked, "Grandmother, may I be a doctor?" that gracious and imperturbable old lady is said to have replied, "Dear child, you may be anything you like." But in 1890, especially in Montreal, this was more easily said than accomplished. Sir Donald Smith, later Lord Strathcona, the benefactor of women's education at McGill, had very stern notions of female decorum and had insisted on 'equal but separate' education for women. Sir William Dawson, the unchallengeable Principal, supported him fully. Women in Arts were few and segregated, and barely tolerated, but the idea of women in medicine was unthinkable. Maude nevertheless applied to enter the McGill medical school and received the ex-

pected reply that the Faculty “could not see its way to undertaking the medical education of women.” Despite the fact that Elizabeth Blackwell had graduated M.D. at Geneva, New York in 1849, women were only very slowly and reluctantly being accepted into the profession in both Great Britain and the United States. At McGill, ruled by Sir William and endowed by Sir Donald and deeply influenced by the conservatism of French Canada, the idea was still thirty years before its time. It took the First World War to effect the change, and women were not admitted to McGill Medical School until the year 1917, and then only on a year’s trial basis. The first class graduated in 1922.

Closed doors

Thus in 1890, Maude Abbott was knocking on a closed door. There were, however, in Montreal two other medical schools. There was the ‘Ecole de médecine et de chirurgie,’ but that was still fighting its battles to survive as the Faculté de Médecine de l’Université Laval à Montréal and, in any case, was most unlikely to be less conservative than McGill. But there was also the Faculty of Medicine of Bishop’s University. This was in fact both a rival to McGill and its *altera persona*. The teaching was in large part given by McGill professors, and its clinical courses were based in the wards of the McGill teaching hospital, the Montreal General — but it was not McGill. It had a separate building on Ontario Street. Maude Abbott received entrance there, but in later years she wrote:

Those were dark days. No longer within the walls of my beloved McGill, among rough students, many of whom seemed to me to have lower standards than those individuals who had worked together for the pure joy of the [task?], and struggling as only a First year student in medicine does struggle with the bare bones of anatomy — it was a dreary round! But Dr. Springle our Professor in Anatomy and Dr. Brière in Pathology were bright lights on our horizon, and the work at the M.G.H. was in prospect.

But the McGill Faculty had not reconciled itself to the pertinacious Miss Abbott and it still controlled the Montreal General Hospital’s teaching function, and when she applied as a Bishop’s student for her ticket of entrance to the Montreal General wards, she again met with refusal.

But there had been a precedent. Grace Ritchie, a graduate in McGill’s first class of women, had been accepted by Queen’s University for medicine, and after three years there had transferred to the Montreal General Hospital for her final year. She was one of the first of Canada’s woman doctors. The McGill Medical Faculty had intended her case to be an anomaly — but the precedent was there. Moreover, Maude had powerful support. There was John, her eminent

cousin, at that time a Senator and Government Leader in the Upper House, and there was, even more importantly, a group of Montreal citizens who had formed 'The Montreal Association for the Professional Education of Women.' These men and women took up Maude's cause, and made it a matter of newspaper correspondence and editorials, to the point at which a number of the hospital's subscribers announced publicly that they would withhold their annual donations unless Maude was admitted. So, grudgingly, the Faculty gave way, and she returned, as if from an exile, into the ambiance if not the structure of her 'beloved McGill.' But Maude suffered deeply from the unwelcome notoriety.

The papers were again full of the pro's and con's of the situation, and of "the poor little men students" who were about to be invaded and who needed protection from the "great big lady student" who was about to descend on them. I felt the publicity of it, then and earlier, and it made me very unhappy.

Grace Ritchie had moved on, and Maude was the only woman student; some of the men she had known from her undergraduate days: "I used to look longingly across at them, but I was now in an alien school, and somehow we did not grow intimate and I was very lonely." But the work she enjoyed, despite some embarrassing moments, and Dr. F. J. Shepherd was particularly kind to her, taking beds away from "that fellow who is never here when he is wanted" and giving them to Maude in return "for a well-worked up case report." It is typical of her that she thought of additional work as a reward. She graduated M.D. (Bishop's) in 1894, winning the Senior Anatomy prize and the Chancellor's Prize for the highest marks in the final examination.

The Bishop's Faculty of Medicine folded in 1905, and its remnants were absorbed by McGill, with the particular proviso that its graduates were to be regarded as alumni of the McGill Medical School, so Maude finally became an alumna of the Faculty which had been so ungenerous to her. However, the sense of alienation was not fully healed until 1910 when she received the McGill M.D.C.M. degree *honoris causa*, in recognition of her growing international reputation in research.

Opening doors

In between graduation and her honorary degree, she had been very busy. She first spent three years travelling, visiting London, Heidelberg and Vienna, spending two years in the latter city, perfecting her German and engaging in a wide range of postgraduate studies which laid the foundations of her future career. Her brass plate appeared outside 156 Mansfield Street, Montreal, in November 1897, but her work was not to lie in general practice. She herself said she engaged in it only to provide the wherewithal to do research. A few

weeks after returning to Montreal she was present at a meeting of the Montreal branch of the British Medical Association at which Dr. Shepherd and Dr. J. G. Adami of the Royal Victoria Hospital, an institution at that time only five years old, reported a rare case of pigmentation cirrhosis. It so happened that Maude Abbott had seen a similar case in Albrecht's laboratory in Vienna and had brought home with her some microscope slides. Dr. Adami generously turned the case over to her to work up, and at the same time Dr. C. F. Martin asked her to undertake "a statistical study on Functional Heart Murmurs, based on the records in the hospital since its opening." The first of these papers gained her membership in the Montreal Medico-chirurgical Society, of which she was the first woman member; the second was published in the *British Journal of Pathology and Bacteriology* in February 1900. It was the first contribution to that Society and Journal presented by a woman, and contributed materially to her growing reputation.

The next development rounded out the program which was to keep her fully occupied to the end of her career. It was her appointment as Curator of the McGill Medical Museum. It may seem now, as it undoubtedly seemed then, a useful but somewhat minor responsibility. Her experience in Vienna, however, her energy and initiatives, and above all her own vision of what could be, enabled her first to elaborate a logical system of specimen classification, based upon the decimal system of library categories, which greatly increased the museum's usefulness; and secondly, to develop the museum as an effective teaching instrument. To succeeding years of medical students, 'Maudie's' lectures in pathology, illustrated and structured by the specimen collection, was one of the memorable highlights. Dr. R. F. Ruttan had said that the Museum "needed a lover," and Maude gave it one; but hers was not a possessive love, but rather one which derived its enjoyment from sharing the collection's rich possibilities with all who could derive pleasure and profit from them.

The Museum led to further, wider contacts. Its reorganization took her down to Johns Hopkins, where she met William Osler for the first time. He was to become one of the abiding influences in her life, both while he was in Baltimore and even more so after he removed to Oxford. In return he came to admire her work to such an extent that he invited her to contribute the section on congenital cardiac anomalies for his *System of Medicine*. When he received it he replied:

I knew you would write a good article but I did not expect one of such extraordinary merit. It is by far and away the best thing ever written on the subject in English — possibly in any language.

Others, too, began to recognize her outstanding abilities and capacity for work, and when the International Association of Medical Museums was formed she became the Association's Secretary. She served from

1907 to 1938 and was also editor of the Association's *Journal of Technical Methods* and of its *Bulletin*. When Osler died in 1919 it was decided to produce the next issue of the *Bulletin* as a memorial number. Maude Abbot worked on it for the next six years and finally it appeared as a six-hundred page volume. It included among much else an annotated bibliography of all Osler's writings. Maude never did things by halves.

Fame, and an assistant professorship

In North America and even in Europe, Maude Abbott came to be recognized as the authority on congenital heart conditions; specimens were sent to her museum, and young cardiologists from near and far came to McGill to study with her for shorter or for longer periods, just as she had gone, twenty years earlier, to Vienna. Her *Atlas of Congenital Heart Disease* was published in 1936 by the American Heart Association, and remains a classic. In the mural in Mexico City at the Institute of Cardiology, Maude Abbott is represented among the world's eminent cardiologists and is indeed the sole Canadian figure included among them. Dr. Jessie Boyd Scriver tells how when she was visiting medical centres in Europe in 1932, and introduced herself as coming from Canada, she was invariably met with the comment, "Ah, then you must know Dr. Maude Abbott!" Maude greatly enhanced the reputation of the Faculty that had accepted her so reluctantly.

Even so, some of the old prejudices still remained. In 1919 she was offered the Chair of Pathology at the Women's Medical College of Pennsylvania, but she preferred to stay as Museum Curator at McGill. In 1923 the offer was renewed and this time she went on loan from McGill for two years as Visiting Professor and Acting Head of the Department, with the especial assignment of its overhaul and rehabilitation. This she accomplished so well that when she left, her work endured, and the Department went on to solid achievements. But on her return, the McGill Faculty rewarded her loyalty with nothing more than a lowly assistant professorship. No doubt her Chairman and the Dean found rationalizations for their lack of generosity. Her teaching responsibility in the undergraduate course was indeed not great; her reputation was in research, and her work mostly in the Hospital laboratories rather than in the University; but even so, something more than an assistant professorship would have been in order. Unconsciously, they were probably still protecting themselves from 'the great big lady student' who had invaded their male preserve. Her personal relationships with colleagues and students were friendly and appreciative, and she was the centre of a large circle of affectionate interest and sometimes of concern (she showed a decided tendency to be somewhat accident-prone) but the Faculty remained strangely unresponsive to her achievements. When she came to retirement age in 1936, the University was more forthcoming, and awarded her its LL.D.

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degree *honoris causa*. Stephen Leacock had to retire at the same time and made a great fuss about it; Maude accepted the honour with great appreciation, but continued working without any change of habits. She was still as active as ever until shortly before her death in 1940.

Maude Abbott was a rich and complex character. Her efforts on behalf of the professional education of women; her contribution to nursing education; her gift for friendship, her literary skills and her many historical writings; her devotion to her sister Alice who from the Vienna days developed a mental instability which left her entirely dependent on Maude; the strange interlude when in middle age she discovered a half-brother, Harry Babin, a Kansas clergyman, and had an emotion-charged correspondence with him, which can only be understood in terms of a high-souled and truly platonic love-affair, which lasted over twelve months and died as swiftly as it had arisen; her happy disregard for social proprieties and her uninhibited desire to help all who called upon her; above all the genuine, inner humility which allowed her to rise to positions of great fame and yet preserve to the end her essential innocence — all this makes her a large, attractive and extroverted personality, but there was also a profound and enigmatic quality within her. She was known irreverently as 'Maudie' to generations of students, but there were few if any who did not respect her deeply as a person.

When she died, Maude Elizabeth Seymour Abbott returned to St. Andrews East, to be buried in the graveyard of the Church in which her family had worshipped for a century, and of which her grandfather William had been Rector when in June 1829 he made that journey into Montreal to be present with his brother, Joseph, at the inauguration of McGill College in James McGill's Burnside house. Joseph, John and Maude were three generations of Abbotts who contributed greatly to the McGill story; but she who at the beginning appeared to have least to offer, at the end of the story had brought it to a most honourable conclusion.

[*Author's note:*

This paper had its genesis in a presentation on Maude Abbott to the James McGill Society on 5 March 1977 by Margaret Gillett, Professor in the McGill Faculty of Education. Her research has generously been made available for the writing of this article. The presentation was prefaced by an account of Joseph Abbott and John J. C. Abbott by Stanley Frost, Director of the History of McGill Project. The Babin story was researched by Barbara Tunis, Research Assistant for the Project in Ottawa, who, furnished with a single clue, a hint supplied by Dr. E. A. Collard, very competently uncovered the whole story. Dr. John Howes, Academic Dean of the John Abbott College, very kindly made available his personal file on the outstanding Canadian for whom his College is named. Stanley Frost acknowledges his debt to his collaborators with much appreciation.]