

## Charitable and Educational Endeavours

Since the first famous charitable “*Scots Box*”<sup>1</sup> came into existence circa 1611 in London, England, Scottish expatriates, wherever they settled, have had a history of establishing a Scottish Society to assist their Scottish brethren in need of aid. In accordance with this tradition, the Scots in Montreal established their charitable society in 1835. While they may not have acquired an actual “*Scots Box*” as did the Scots Charitable Society of Boston (founded in 1657 as The Scots Box Society) they proceeded by other means to raise funds and dispense charity to relieve the distress of their fellow countrymen who were arriving at the Port of Montreal in a state of destitution; many of them victims of either the Highland Clearances or famine. Initially, this undertaking was the responsibility of the Society’s Chaplains who were later assisted by a Standing Committee, which in 1845 became known as the “*Charitable Committee*”, its weekly meetings being held at Mack’s Hotel in Montreal.

Throughout the ongoing years, the Society’s volunteers untiringly cared for their needy and also newly arrived Scottish brethren in every way possible. Those in transit received aid for their transportation expenses to their final destinations in Upper Canada, Canada West or the United States.

In 1857, on the advice of the Charitable Committee, the Society decided to take a seven-year lease of a house on St. George Street to provide a Home as a respite for immigrants travelling onwards and also for

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<sup>1</sup> The term “*Scots Box*” originally referred to a box within which was placed monetary donations by the more successful Scottish emigrants to assist their less fortunate compatriots who had also followed their Monarch, King James VI, to the metropolis of London when he inherited the English Crown in 1603.

those Scots in Montreal who, for various reasons, required shelter. The Home, although not quite ready for full operation, was opened on June 11<sup>th</sup>, 1857 under the direction of the Charitable Committee, assisted by a recently formed Committee of Ladies and a newly arrived Superintendent from Scotland. Sixteen days later, all of them would be involved in the Charitable Society’s most challenging undertaking in its history - the relief of the Scottish victims in the S.S. “*Montreal*” disaster which occurred on the St. Lawrence River between Quebec City and Montreal. Out of 450 passengers on board, 320 of whom were newly arrived Scottish immigrants, over 250 perished. Because of the outstanding efforts of the two committees, special mention must be made of their remarkable achievement in handling the situation so efficiently. Within hours of the arrival of the rescue ship S.S. “*Napoleon*” at the Port of Montreal on the morning of June 27<sup>th</sup>, 76 Scottish survivors were securely installed in the Home and the committee members and volunteers had begun the task of their identification, especially the orphaned children. Some of those who had perished in the disaster were also identified and prior to their burial, side-by-side in the Society’s cemetery lot, their personal belongings were cleaned and preserved for future claiming. The funeral service, attended by the Society’s Office Bearers and some of the grieving survivors, was conducted by one of the Society’s chaplains. “*All but three of the dead were children, two were mothers, one a well-grown lad.*” The number of children buried could either be 12 or 13, according to different records of the time.

The plight of the survivors was devastating. Many of them, members of families who had crossed the Atlantic anticipating a new life, were now alone and penniless, their worldly possessions lost in the wreck. Some of the immigrants had planned to start-up in business, some were skilled tradesmen and engineers, and a few were professionals. For

this reason, it was believed that valuable assets were still on board the “*Montreal*” which prompted the Society’s President to telegraph a contact in Quebec requesting close surveillance of the wreck because “*a large amount of money must be in the hold*”. The Society also engaged a legal advisor in the interest of the survivors and advised all of them to “*carefully prepare a statement of their loss previous to leaving the Home and sign a Power of Attorney in favour of the legal advisor authorising him to act on their behalf*”. Every class of the community offered assistance, including the Railway, Steamboat, Telegraph and Cemetery companies who gave their services without charge in the interest of the survivors and the deceased. Not only the Scots in Montreal but also others throughout the country and the U.S.A. rallied with offers and substantial donations, as also did the other national societies.

Where possible, relatives or friends of the victims were contacted and the survivors, when able, travelled by train to their next destination or returned by ship to their families in Scotland. Prior to departure, each and every one of them was outfitted, provided with appropriate funds, a transportation ticket and a trunk complete with extra clothing and necessities. In one instance, a Bank of Montreal trust fund was established involving an amount of sterling equivalent to \$139, found on the body of a drowned father whose young children had miraculously survived. At the age of majority, they later received, by legal discharge, the sum of \$335. As always, the untiring efforts of the Society’s doctors and chaplains were invaluable. The Society had indeed lived up to its motto “*Relieve the Distressed*”. Under extremely difficult circumstances, it had cared for the well-being of the victims, both physically and spiritually. It was published: “*If the Society had never done anything more to relieve distress than it did in connection with the frightful calamity, it would have earned the*

*permanent gratitude of all classes of the community*”.

Letters of appreciation and donations from the grateful survivors as well as many of the relatives in Scotland were received throughout the year, and later.

A debt of \$400 was incurred during the winter of 1861, as a result of the Charitable Committee’s benevolent gesture of opening a soup kitchen for those sheltered in the Home and others in need throughout the city. As usual, the Society in conjunction with the Caledonian and Thistle Societies organised a concert, the Ladies’ Committee provisioning a refreshment table. The net proceeds of \$382 helped to clear the outstanding debt.

The lease on the house in St. George Street having expired, a motion was carried in February 1866 to purchase an available building on Dorchester Street, near St. Urbain, for use as the St. Andrew’s Home, provided it could be purchased for the sum of £1,100. It was also stipulated that at least three-quarters of this amount be subscribed prior to completion of the purchase. Three months later, with \$2,700 subscribed, the deed was passed on April 30<sup>th</sup>, the owner having agreed to sell at the aforementioned price. Twenty-one years later, the Society would sell the same property for \$6,750.

On April 6<sup>th</sup>, 1869 William Scott, nephew of Sir Walter Scott, died in the St. Andrew’s Home where he had been in residence for over two years suffering from cancer. He was well known to Past President John Greenshields who when advising the Scott family in Scotland of their relative’s death mentioned that he had been acquainted with him for over 15 years. His burial took place in one of the Society’s lots in Mount Royal Cemetery on April 9<sup>th</sup>. At his uncle’s request, William Scott had travelled to Montreal, in June, 1829, with a friend of Sir Walter Scott’s, Adam Ferrie (the Society’s first Vice President) and his family from



Group of Clergy, St. Andrew's Home, Aqueduct St.,  
Montreal, QC, 1902, II-142700, McCord Museum of Canadian History, Montreal

Glasgow where Adam Ferrie was as well known by the community there as he was in Montreal for "*his integrity and great honesty of purpose*".

Some time later, a very generous donation was sent to the Home by the Hope Scott family at Abbotsford as well as gifts to those who had cared for their relative prior to his death. The family also sent a memento, relating to Sir Walter Scott, to the Society but, unfortunately, this has not been seen in our archives for many years. Two other gifts, however, which were donated to the Society seven years later by Andrew Wilson, remain in our archives and were on display at the McCord Museum during the Sesquicentennial Exhibition. They are two handsomely framed oil paintings, purchased in Scotland. One is a likeness of Sir Walter Scott and the other of Robert Burns.

After a period of twenty years, the St. Andrew's Home on Dorchester Street required constant repair and was no longer

large enough for the Society's needs. Accordingly, preliminary steps were taken in 1886 to acquire a new and appropriate establishment. On May 17<sup>th</sup>, 1887, a resolution was passed to purchase the house and grounds, known as the Gould property, from the Canadian Pacific Railway Company at a price of \$22,500. The house on Dorchester Street having been sold to Mr. John Auld for the sum of \$6,750, the transaction for the property was quickly executed and by November 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1887 the Society's President, R. B. Angus, was welcoming the members to their first meeting in the new Home on Aqueduct Street. He informed them that the total cost including alterations and repairs would be \$32,325. This was a major undertaking but the enterprise appealed to the Scottish community and also to the members who took a keen interest in its furnishing, a number of them donating "*the handsome furnishings of the hall, reception and committee rooms*". In addition to providing shelter for the sick and the needy, the Home

also provided accommodation for the Scottish Choir's practices, a Sunday School and the meetings of the Caledonian Society which donated an annual contribution of \$100 and for some years \$250.

An enterprising junior group, named the Daughters of St. Andrew's, was formed in 1905. The first project of the twelve young ladies, daughters of members, was a Tea for the residents of the Old People's Home at Longue Pointe, followed by a Scottish concert. With the concert proceeds they purchased appropriate materials from which they created a large quantity of winter garments for adults and children in need. Their keen efforts were ongoing and in addition to organising a Children's Christmas Party each year, they also supported a young boy in his education at the Hervey Institute on Mountain Street.

These are only a few instances of the remarkable work of the Society's volunteers in times of distress, and also during periods

of unemployment and depression in the first seventy years. When funds were urgently required, two phrases repeatedly appear in the Society's records - "*raise a subscription*" and "*organise a concert*". When concert attendances numbered at times, 1,500 and 2,000, it is easily understood how their charitable endeavours were so successfully achieved.

In 1910, the Aqueduct Street Home was occupied for twelve weeks by twenty-six nurses from the Typhoid Emergency Hospital and after the Great War it was placed at the disposal of the Khaki League Club for the use of returning soldiers. Since the government had finally taken over the responsibility of immigrants in 1914, the Home was no longer the necessity that it had been. The Society decided, therefore, that the amount required for its upkeep and operation would be better utilised in caring for the needy. To the regret of many, especially the Scottish community, the Home was sold to Ernest Cousins Ltd. in 1925 for \$40,000, the



St. Andrew's Home, May 1925

amount being added to the Society's charitable funds that all too soon would be "*utilised in caring for those in need*".

The Daughters of St. Andrew's Auxiliary amalgamated with the Ladies Committee who were working in conjunction with the Charitable Committee; all of them would soon become dedicated throughout the next several years to alleviating the plight of the needy Scots in Montreal and also those in transit during a period of economic depression unequalled in Canadian history.

In order to determine the aid required for those in need, the members of the Ladies Committee made regular visits in the districts "*of Cote St. Paul, Hochelaga, Longue Pointe, Maisonneuve, North-end, Pointe St. Charles, Rosemount, St. Henri, Verdun and the City*". At commencement, the regular visits averaged 100 but they would soon number 200 per year in response to rising unemployment. In the year 1930, for example, assistance was given to 200 families and in 1931 the sum dispensed for meals and lodgings to homeless men was \$1,118. From the years 1925 to 1933 the total amount of relief given was \$44,654 with donations from members for the same period being \$23,843; this last amount did not include the annual subscriptions, donations of new clothing and the customary well-filled Christmas hampers, also donated, which in December, 1929 were distributed to 124 families. In addition, the Society also made liberal donations to the relief work of other associations during this critical period.

Thanks to the generosity of the Canadian Pacific Ocean Services, Cunard White Star and Robert Reford Company, the Society throughout those critical years was able to buy reduced-rate fares for the destitute who had no choice but to go back to Scotland, thus providing them "*with the opportunity to return to Canada in more prosperous times which would not have been possible if they had been deported*".

Throughout the years, and particularly in the earlier period, the voluntary medical services provided by the Society's Honorary Physicians were remarkable. Again, in this later period of crisis, Dr. A. E. Vipond, founder of the Montreal Children's Hospital and also the Society's Honorary Physician, attended promptly and willingly to every case of illness brought to his attention, "*many owing their restored health to his kindness and skill*".

More recently the Charitable Committee became known as the Welfare Committee. It still carries on the Society's traditions of providing for those in need who are of Scottish descent. Also, in certain cases recommended by the Chairman of the committee, the services and assistance of the Honorary Solicitor, Honorary Physician and Honorary Chaplain are available.



Badge of The Black Watch (Royal Highland Regiment) of Canada

Following the Society's incorporation in 1858, Bill 130 enacted in 1948 plus other amendments, the Society's By-Laws have now been completely revised. With a broader mandate, the Society's charitable work now extends into the fields of education, youth training, social, artistic and sporting activities. These additional powers allowed for a grant to be given to The Black Watch (RHR) of Canada in 1952 for the organisation of a Junior Pipe Band. Since

then, the Society has regularly supported The Black Watch Cadet Corps Pipes and Drums, and in 1999 presented the band with a set of bagpipes. In keeping with the Society's aims to preserve and stimulate Scottish traditions, donations are also given to the Montreal Highland Games, the Montreal Highland Dancing Association and the 78<sup>th</sup> Fraser Highlanders, the regiment that was re-raised in 1965 by Colonel J. Ralph Harper and David M. Stewart who were both Past Presidents of the Society.



Black Watch Boys Pipes and Drums on parade,  
Sherbrooke Street, 1960

The minutes of 1845 record that several meetings were held during the year “to discuss proposals to form bursaries in the High School with a view to aid deserving Scotch lads in obtaining a superior education” but the motion was not finally adopted. Today, however, on the recommendation of the Education Committee, grants, loans and post-secondary bursaries are available to qualified students of Scottish descent attending colleges and universities. These grants currently represent the bulk of the Society's charitable activities as we support approximately twenty students per year. Funds are also made available to Bishops University, Concordia University, Université de Montréal and the Presbyterian College for the distribution of awards to appropriately qualified candidates.

The main source of revenue for the Society's charitable endeavours continues to be the annual Ball plus the proceeds from the other

two annual events, the Malt Whisky-Tasting Evening initiated in 1971, and the Burns Supper, the first of which was held at the University Club in 1980.

During 1985, the Society established the St. Andrew's Society of Montreal Charitable Fund, which is a registered Canadian charity, thus enabling the Society to issue tax receipts for donations that it receives.

Throughout the years the Society has also received a number of legacies, some from immigrants who had long remembered the kindness and aid received from the Society on their arrival in Montreal. In 1947, through the generosity of Lieutenant-Colonel C. W. MacLean, the MacLean Endowment Fund of \$5,000 was established to assist promising young students of Scottish descent, in adverse financial conditions, to continue their studies. This fund is still in existence at the present time, as is the Keith Radley Hutchison Award Fund which provides an annual award of \$500 to a Black Watch (RHR) of Canada piper of excellent character possessing exceptional piping skills and demonstrating a strong aptitude for playing solo.

“The Society will continue to flourish if it continues in the spirit in which it was founded”. These words are just as valid now as they were in the past and while there are still young people with initiative and interest in their Scottish heritage who are willing to participate in the Society's charitable endeavours, its objectives “will continue to flourish” long into the future.

*“O Thou, who kindly dost provide  
For every creature's want,  
We bless thee, God of Nature wide,  
For all thy goodness lent:  
And if it please thee, Heavenly Guide,  
May never worse be sent;  
But whether granted, or denied,  
Lord, bless us with content!”*

Robert Burns