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ROMANTICISM, HOME, AND DEATH: ELEMENTS IN THE LIVES OF THE ANGLOPHONE ELITE IN EARLY VICTORIAN MONTREAL

At the Canadian Studies Conference in Hobart, July 1996,[1] I presented a paper that formed part of a larger inter-generational study of the McCord family, from the British conquest of New France (1760) to World War I. The McCords—Ulster Scots who arrived in Canada at the time of the Conquest—became a powerful Montreal family. The third generation of McCords in Canada (and our principals here) was led by John Samuel McCord, an endlessly active man obsessed with public and private duty and a central player in the ordering of the more sober anglophone institutions: the established church, English-speaking universities, the Protestant cemetery in Montreal, the natural history and horticulture societies, and the court system in rural areas around Montreal. Studying John Samuel and the McCord family has given me a strong sense of their deepening ethnic coherence over time, their concept of élite privilege, and of changing gender roles in early Victorian Canada.

For the male McCords there are many of the obvious themes one would expect in a colonial élite: posturing and bravado, swords and horses, feudal property and class privilege, and a strong consciousness of Britishness in a colony that was majoritarian French. But, thanks to a superb collection of papers in the archives of the McCord Museum of Canadian History, we can penetrate much further into the culture and private existence of this generation. For instance, John Samuel McCord

and his wife Anne Ross were profoundly influenced by romantics like Walter Scott and William Wordsworth.

This personal and family itinerary, this sense of *noblesse oblige*, Anglicanism, Montrealness, Britishness, and the McCords' sensitivity to nature and feeling must be juxtaposed to crucial political events which marked this period in Canadian history. The quarter-century from 1837 to completion of the Victoria Bridge over the St. Lawrence River at Montreal in 1860 corresponded to a period of great political insecurity and turbulent social relations in the Montreal area. The rebellions of 1837–38 were benchmarks in Canadian history with its nationalist and radical losers hung, exiled, or deported to remote British colonies in Australia or Bermuda. This left the stage to the conservative élite, to men like John Samuel McCord, who used martial law, the suspension of the assembly in Lower Canada, and the establishment of rule by a Special Council, to effect fundamental social and institutional change.[2] To impose their will, they used British symbols, institutions, ideology, and, when push came to shove, the punishing military force bestowed by British authority on local volunteer militia forces.

Having treated these important public and political issues elsewhere, my Hobart presentation concentrated on the more intimate and private elements of homes, death, and burial.[3] Presenting a paper on the private lives of the conservative victors in the Lower Canadian rebellions of 1837 to an audience in Tasmania was sobering, particularly since, before the conference, I visited Port Arthur where the drama of the imperialist attempt to deal with deviance is graphically exposed. Important historians—George Rudé, Allan Greer, Jean-Paul Bernard, and most recently Beverley Boissery in her *A Deep Sense of Wrong: The Treason, Trials, and Transportation to New South Wales of Lower Canadian Rebels after the 1838 Rebellions* (1995)—have given voice to Canadians lost in nineteenth-century exile in Port Arthur or Sydney.

Complicating the task for the reader of an academic paper in Canadian studies was the fact that my visit to Port Arthur followed shortly after the massacre of May 1996. Just across from the empty cells, coffin-like pews, and eerie medical and officer quarters, were the bullet holes, the bloodstained café, the flowers, and the monument to the victims. This horror and the prison backdrop made it impossible to disentangle past and present and to separate the historian of deviance from the tourist of the macabre. The audience in Hobart exhibited the same schizophrenia. They expected the university historian to explain Victorian toryism, a British colonial élite, and the minds of the winners who had banished the losers to Australia; they also wanted the

Montrealer to interpret the Quebec referendum of October 1995 and its lingering grapeshot which fouled the air into 1996. Perhaps my feelings were just technicolour for what is the historian's constant obsession with the objective/subjective, but my presentation necessarily had to coast from the rebellions of 1837–38 to the referendum of 1995, from Victorian angst to ours in contemporary Montreal and Tasmania.

John Samuel McCord was thirty-seven in 1837, the year Queen Victoria took the throne and the first of two years when Canadians in Upper and Lower Canada rebelled against British authority. He died twenty-eight years later, one year before the Canadian Confederation. Like most bourgeois men, he seems to have little in common with his male peers; however, he did explain much in the diary he kept for the later years of his life. Far from being the dry, impervious judge I had pictured on the bench, the tough landlord who squeezed tenants, and the hapless businessmen who skirted with bankruptcy, McCord reverberated in his diary as a gentle and concerned father, a loving husband, and an individual anxious over health and finances. Once beyond his beery youth and into marriage and parenthood, he became dutiful—a man for whom love, death, and family were central life experiences.

Home: Temple Grove

John Samuel McCord had been raised at the Grange, a rough and awkward house on Nazareth fief, the family estate. John Samuel's father had rented the fief in 1793 as a rural investment and its use remained mixed. The Grange was a rough bourgeois abode, a home in evolution as family fortunes rose and waned, and a house that sheltered an extended family. After the Napoleonic wars, factories, shipyards, and workers' houses developed on the fief. Construction of the Lachine Canal nearby further changed land use dramatically; urban development of their land brought new wealth to the McCords and permitted them to live as *rentiers* for the next half-century.

In his choice in 1832 of Anne Ross as his wife, John Samuel McCord significantly improved his social standing. His father-in-law, a former attorney-general and one of Montreal's wealthiest lawyers, owned a fashionable town house on Champ de Mars. In 1836 McCord bought a site on Mount Royal and, a year later, during the Rebellions, he constructed his house—"Temple Grove." Across from the Sulpician's mountain estate, it commanded superb views of river and city. The family at first used it as a summer home, but moved there permanently in 1844. Its beauty, simplicity, use of elevation, and architecture mark its neo-classicism. With a portico on three sides supported by unfluted,

baseless Doric columns, the house conformed to what architectural historian Harold Kallman (1994, 303) called a "virile" classical style. Indeed, the Greeks were a central part of John Samuel McCord's vision, as his son explained decades later:

> 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 have built upon it a Temple—and so shall I.'" (McCord Archives, n.d.)

Temple Grove represented a different vision from the McCord home on Nazareth Fief. The flatness, swampiness, incongruity, and utility of the Grange was replaced by the symmetry and inspiration of a site which looked down at the city from the slopes of a mountain. Speaking to mind, feeling, and the spiritual, Temple Grove was a powerful statement of class and culture. Even its name was borrowed from a Wordsworth poem and its ambience was intended to recapture the mood of "Above Tintern Abbey":

> For I have learned
> To look on nature, not as in the hour
> Of thoughtless youth; but hearing oftentimes
> The still, sad music of humanity
> . . . . . .
> And I have felt
> A presence that disturbs me with the joy
> Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
> Of something far more deeply interfused,
> Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
> And the round ocean and the living air,
> And the blue sky ...

Temple Grove was to be unhurried, a place remote from the proletariat, the rebellions of 1837, and the frequent fires which ravaged the city below. Its separateness was emphasized by its beauty, its classicism, and its shaping of nature. Trips into the city required a horse and carriage; the lives of wife and children were necessarily concentrated on Temple Grove and its surrounding estates and mountain backdrop.

The garden and grounds at Temple Grove were witness to the human ability to control nature. Rather than forest and "savage," the grounds of Temple Grove featured croquet, a gazebo, and an ornate bridge; garden seeds and bulbs were imported from New York and England. In winter, sleigh rides around the mountain replaced garden walks. McCord himself gave his leisure to flowers and shrubs and to shaping his part of the mountain to his definition of beauty. From his observation point above the city, he also could indulge his amateur

scientist's passion for record-keeping: meteorology, botany, and geology. From the porch of Temple Grove he observed the ice break-up on the Saint Lawrence River.[4]

The grounds also spoke to the intensely private and were designed as a place of meditation, isolation, and melancholy—what Wordsworth, speaking of Constable, called "emotion collected in tranquility" (*Dictionnaire universalis*). McCord explained the importance of his garden in his diary:

> Walked around the garden for an hour, resting at each seat, and thinking over our probable separation from our beautiful garden, on their putting into effect the new Judicature Act. (McCord Papers no.414)[5]

If the garden symbolized peace, life inside Temple Grove was characterized by perpetual motion around activities in art, science, natural history, music, literature, philanthropy, letter-writing, and socializing. Anglicanism held a central place in family life. The closest family friends and most frequent dinner guests were prominent lay leaders, bishops and chapel deans; the first Anglican Bishop of Montreal, Francis Fulford, was given a key to the garden for his walks and meditation. Confirmation classes, communion, and Sunday attendance at Christ Church were pivotal outings with absences for illness noted carefully in the diary. Examining his conscience, John Samuel recorded his worry that he was not contributing enough to his family and society:

> The 24th anniversay of our wedding day. How many blessings to be thankful for and how little a return I have made. My spirits are low, and far from feeling as joyful as I ought for so many blessings. All, this day and home and in health. That alone should be sufficient. Oh God give me more faith, and courage, and grace to do thy will. Anne and I went to Church. (MP no. 0413)

Furnishings at Temple Grove were eclectic. Furniture and china from earlier McCord and Ross family homes were found throughout the house while paintings included views of Montreal commissioned by McCord himself. His meteorological records and aeolian harp competed for space with his wife's watercolours and commonplace books.

McCord played an active and interventionist role in family life. When away on circuit he wrote daily letters with news, instructions, and valentine greetings. At home, family illness, progress at school, and communion for the children were grist for his personal attention. When their youngest children were too small to attend Christ Church, he shared the duty of staying at home while Anne Ross went to church with

the older children. He took his children to meetings of the Natural History Society and other learned talks, and on occasion they accompanied him to university convocations or on his judicial circuit.

Death and the Cemetery

John Samuel McCord was instrumental in constructing Montreal's Protestant cemetery on the east side of Mount Royal, on the opposite side from Temple Grove. To him the cemetery was much more than a bone depository or a place of death and human fright; a romantic in death as well as life, he saw the cemetery as combining the bucolic with ordered social space, the entwining of beauty and death. This inspiration failed him on a cloudy morning, 21 September 1863, just two years before his own death, when he and his wife brought the eldest of their six children—"their beloved Elly," or "Lizzy," for burial: "may a gracious God," he implored his diary, "give us all the strength to go through our solemn and painful duty this day." And later: "a dreadful scene, and drive to Mount Royal and the conversation on the way—*frightful* rain from 3 P.M. Courtland Freer buried some 30 min before my child.... All my fond dreams have melted away" (MP vol. 420). It was alongside Eleanor that John Samuel McCord himself was buried on 1 July 1865. In turn, Anne Ross was buried in the plot in May 1870 and, a half-century later, the body of their son and the founder of the McCord Museum, David Ross, was brought there.

While Temple Grove epitomized the intimate and familial, Mount Royal Cemetery was a carefully constructed script of the same themes in public space. For the McCords, the cemetery represented their public persona, their character and sense of duty, their cult of beauty as well as their conception of class and neighbourhood. Like Temple Grove, it stated fundamental relationships with nature, peers, and lessers. In McCord's mind, the cemetery was both a natural venue and a carefully contrived public institution: family, beauty, and mortality were placed in a museum of nature and death that the visitor to the cemetery still captures today.

Victorians like John Samuel McCord undertook the whole process of redefining the graveyard and the public display of death as part of their public responsibility. The cemetery represented a crucial conjuncture of public display and ceremony with the most private expression of love, chagrin, passion, and loss.[6] Early death was common to the mid-nineteenth-century Montreal élite with cholera, infant mortality, and typhus punishing the bourgeoisie as well as the proletariat: the average age of adults over sixteen who were buried in the Toronto necropolis

was 43.9 in the period 1850–54. Well over a third of the people buried in Toronto's Protestant cemeteries were under one year of age (Barkin & Gentles 1990).

The anxiety of death in Victorian Montreal was heightened by the brutality, indignity, and insalubrity of its cemeteries. "Have you observed," an 1852 parliamentary committee inquiring into urban burials asked, "that the inhaling of the noxious gas escaping from crowded graveyards has any moral influence, inducing the use of stimulants by gravediggers?" "What kinds of diseases," the committee continued, "is the gas diffused from dead bodies most likely to produce, whether inhaled with the atmosphere, or drank with the water which has passed through a burial ground?" Grave robbing and overcrowding were clearly in the minds of the members of the assembly: "Have you ever known coffins to be burnt or removed," they asked, "and the bones they contained deposited elsewhere, or sold, to clear ground for further graves?" (MP vol. 857).

As cities like London, Boston, and Montreal expanded, their cemeteries became overcrowded and increasingly insalubrious.[7] The first Protestant Burial Ground in Montreal had been established in 1799 on a two-acre lot in the Saint Laurent suburb on a site later known as Dorchester Square. As with Boston's Old Granary Burial Ground, this cemetery had mixed urban uses; in any case, by the mid-nineteenth century, the available ground was nearly exhausted (Marsan 1981, 295). McCord, president of the Protestant Burial Ground, was particularly concerned by sanitary conditions: "no one who has seen the imperfect drainage of present ground could hesitate [to support a new cemetery]" (MP vol. 854). The mortuary chapel, for example, doubled as the Church of St. John the Evangelist School: "the most striking sight in the midst of this scene of decay and desolation," Henry Mott noted, "was a little school house, filled with merry children, who in play hours ran about among the tombs" (Cooper 1969, 65).

As the bourgeoisie moved to the suburbs, they took their dead with them. Again, it was Wordsworth who captured the feeling, suggesting that burials be removed to the countryside where gravestones could present lessons to travellers (Linden-Ward 1989). North American cemeteries were moved to peaceful, thoughtful, well-drained, isolated, and secure locations. Here, while the dead were honored, important moral lessons could be imparted to the living.

Mount Auburn Cemetery, founded in 1831 in Cambridge, Massachusetts, was the major inspiration for Montreal's Mount Royal Cemetery. Modeled on the eighteenth-century English landscape garden,

the cemetery had been founded by the Massachusetts Horticultural Society as a tranquil setting for the dead and a place of consolation for the living. The twisting paths that followed the natural landscape, the park-like qualities of the cemetery with streets and paths named after trees and plants, were imitated in the Mount Royal Cemetery. Indeed, artist William Bartlett, who painted so many central Canadian scenes, made an engraving of the Forest Pond at Mount Auburn about 1845 (Linden-Ward 1989).

In July 1847, the Montreal Cemetery Company was incorporated and among its directors were McCord and many of his peers in the Protestant élite: John Torrance, John Smith, William Murray, James Ferrier, Benjamin Holmes, J.H. Maitland, George Moffatt, David Brown, John Redpath, John Molson, Benjamin Lyman, John Mathewson, John Birks, and Henry Vennor. At least one Jew, A.A. David, sat on the first board (Statutes of Canada 1847). The new company, established because of threats to "the health of the City of Montreal," was authorized to purchase up to two hundred arpents for a "Public Cemetery and Garden." The non-sectarian cemetery was to be open to members of the Church of England, Presbyterians, Wesleyan Methodists, Congregationalists, Baptists, Unitarians, and Jews. By the cemetery charter, the poor were to be provided graves free of charge on certificate of a clergyman from their faith that their relations could not afford a plot. There was, however, a political franchise even in death and plot holders of less than one hundred feet were not voting members of the Company.

On 1 April 1851, McCord was named chairman of the Montreal Cemetery Company and the company immediately began looking for a cemetery site (MP no. 410). In the same month, he received the regulations of the Protestant Cemetery in Quebec City. That cemetery was laid out by an engineer of the United States Engineering Department and Quebec City authorities recommended the publications of the Mount Auburn and Greenwood cemeteries as "guides" (MP vol. 856).[8]

In drawing up the Rules and Regulations of the Mount Royal Cemetery, John Samuel McCord relied heavily on those of the Mount Auburn Cemetery, a copy of which he had in his possession. Mount Auburn had been laid out as an "ornamental burial place," as a "garden" with a "cottage" for the Superintendent and Gardener ("Mount Auburn Cemetery" 1832). With its five artificial ponds, its thirty miles of carriage and pedestrian paths, and its favorable location near Harvard University, the Auburn Cemetery was advertised as a place of "beauty"

in which the "repulsive features" of earlier cemeteries had been removed (Dearborn 1843, 1). Many of the regulations—hours of opening, gratuities, prohibition of refreshments, rules for horses, the prohibition for gathering flowers either wild or cultivated—were copied exactly into the Montreal rules. There were minor differences: while the Cambridge cemetery prohibited visitors from discharging firearms, this was replaced in Montreal with a ban on dogs (MP vol. 855, Regulations; vol. 855 Conditions; vol. 857). In both cemeteries, pamphlets were issued urging people to visit the cemetery with a view to self-improvement, to understanding that they were "subservient to some of the highest purposes of religion and human duty" (French 1973, 46). Directors of the Mount Auburn Cemetery originally planned to use their cemetery for the education of gardeners through an institute for Education and Scientific and Practical Gardeners which was to be established on cemetery property (Linden-Ward 1989).

The naturalness of death and its moralizing influence were to be enhanced by providing a high, well-drained, beautiful, natural, and soothing site. Class and family were to be recognized but family plots could only be surrounded by tasteful iron or stone railings; to emphasize permanence, wood was not permitted for either fences or grave markers. Many of the iron fences surrounding graves had gates permitting access for tombside gardeners. These concessions to family flourish were tempered by explicit rules aimed at guaranteeing beauty and the predominance of nature and views. Stone enclosures around plots were not to exceed eighteen inches and "light, neat, and symmetrical" iron railings were restricted to four-and-a-half feet (MP vol. 855, Conditions). Grave excavation and monument erection represented construction sites of potential noise, traffic, and ugliness. To avoid hasty and undignified burials, graves could only be opened with eight hours daylight notice to the superintendent; with a view to beauty he also designated sites to which dirt was to be removed and building materials stored (MP vol. 855, Regulations).

Like Temple Grove, the cemetery was a garden, a form of controlled nature that must never degenerate into anything "detrimental, dangerous, or inconvenient." While encouraging plot owners to cultivate "trees, shrubs, and plants," authorities retained the right to remove obstructive branches or trees. Despite the restrictions on fences and careful instructions concerning the depths of vaults, few restrictions were placed on the size or form of grave monuments although cemetery authorities reserved the right "to prevent the erection of large

improvements which might interfere with the general effect, or obstruct any principal view" (MP vol. 855, Regulations).

The attempt to change the physical space of Montreal by anglophone leaders like John Samuel McCord was part of an ideological struggle. While the orchards, the river, and the British uniforms formed the beauty of travellers' reports, the city was rapidly changing in the early nineteenth century: it was not by chance that the anglophone bourgeoisie moved their families and dead to the safety of Mount Royal. Completion of the greatly enlarged parish church of Notre Dame and construction of the Lachine Canal—both in the 1820s—were symbols of a changing order. Montreal's fortifications had already been torn down while sharpening religious, ethnic and class forces were evident in the *patriote* movement and increasing Irish Catholic immigration. The reaction of British elements went beyond the political and military. In their homes and institutions and in their attempts to harmonize nature and man, élite anglophones wrapped classicism, empire, history, and nature into a common cause.

Boris Ford has dated the end of the Romantic age in Britain to the Crystal Palace exhibition in 1851. This is a suitable benchmark for Montreal too where the anxiety of the early 1830s had dissipated by the late 1850s. McCord, for example, watched construction of the Victoria Bridge from Temple Grove with pride; on 15 December 1859 he recorded in his diary that "this day the first passenger cars went over the Victoria Bridge.... Elly, Jane and I were among the guests" (MP vol. 416). Completion of the bridge with its opening of the Atlantic and the American midwest to Montreal rail promoters, construction of the Crystal Palace in Montreal, and establishment of the major anglophone social and educational institutions in Montreal, brought security to McCord's community. They could relax their romanticism in the decade of the new Canadian Confederation and turn away from nature, the garden, and classicism to glass and iron, factories, the promise of railways, and a new Canadian Confederation in which the rights of anglophones in Quebec would be protected.

NOTES

1 The Association for Canadian Studies in Australia and New Zealand (ACSANZ) held its 1996 biennial conference at the University of Tasmania, Hobart, 7 – 10 July. *Ed.*

2 For elements of state formation in the period after the Rebellions of 1837–38, see Allan Greer and Ian Radforth, eds., *Colonial Leviathan: State Formation in Mid-Nineteenth Century Canada* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1992).

3 See, for example, Pamela Miller, Brian Young, Donald Fyson, Donald Wright, and Moira T. McCaffrey, *The McCord Family: A Passionate Vision* (Montreal: McCord Museum of Canadian History, 1992).

4 For an excellent description of McCord's scientific culture, see Suzanne Zeller, *Land of Promise, Promised Land: The Culture of Victorian Science in Canada* (Ottawa: Canadian Historical Association Historical Booklet no. 56, 1996).

5 McCord Papers hereafter cited as MP.

6 It is Mary Ryan who has best reminded us of the great expansion in manifestions of public ceremony in the period 1825–50. She also notes the extent to which public rites were "clearly marked by masculine signs, most often crafted by male hands." *Women in Public: Between Banners and Ballots, 1825–1880* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins, 1990), 23.

7 For the situation in London and the particular problem of body-snatching, see Ruth Richardson, *Death, Dissection and the Destitute* (London: Penguin, 1988), 81.

8 The McCord Papers (vol. 857, "Miscellanoues") also include form letters from the Toronto Necropolis.

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Statutes of Canada, 1847, Vic XI, cap. LXVII, "An Act to Incorporate the Montreal Cemetery Company," 28 July.

KEN COATES

FIRST NATIONS AND CANADIAN SCHOLARSHIP: THE CONTINUING SEARCH FOR UNDERSTANDING

Thirty years ago, the academic study of First Nations in Canada existed at the margins of the nation's scholarship. Only a handful of academics, most of them anthropologists and ethnographers, paid more than passing attention to the issues and concerns of indigenous people. Aboriginal matters scarcely registered in Canadian history textbooks, except to provide a backdrop to the investigation of European exploration and settlement. And so it was, as well, in other disciplines. The embryonic study of Canadian literature had little room for the consideration of First Nations writing—the tiny amount that had appeared in print. Political scientists virtually ignored Aboriginal issues. And historians did not turn to oral tradition nor to First Nations historians for either verification or a different perspective.

History, racism, and Canadian administration had effectively forced First Nations into the "background" of Canadian life, but they were not destined to remain there. The social ferment of the 1960s created new opportunities for the expression and celebration of First Nations' culture and witnessed the rapid emergence of indigenous politics as a factor in Canadian public life. The abortive attempt to transform the legal status of First Nations through the 1969 White Paper on Indian Affairs generated a sharp and hostile reaction from the indigenous communities and resulted in their rapid politicisation. On the legal front, a succession of victories and near-victories, culminating in the important Supreme Court of Canada decision of the Calder case (1973), forced the Canadian government to re-evaluate its opposition to Aboriginal land claims and to abandon its efforts to eliminate the special