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ACROSS THE ISLAND

Firm Financing Brier Founded By Islander

By NEIL A. MATHESON  
Provincial - Farm Editor

I HAVE to thank several Charlottetown people for suggesting that I should talk this week about Sir William Christopher MacDonald, the Island-born philanthropist who contributed in such unusually large measure to the cause of education in this country. The tie in with this particular week is that he was a founder of the company whose name is associated with the Canadian curling championship competition which we are enjoying here for the first time.

I have been unable in the short time to do any effective research on Sir William's life, but Mrs. Mary Brehaut, Grafton Street has been kind enough to turn over her sketch of his career, for which she gives much of the credit to Charles Williams, former supervisor of the Farm Loan Board here, who is now living with his brother in Saint John.

Sir William was born in Tracadie in 1831, the third son of Hon. Donald MacDonald, a one-time president of the Legislative Council of P.E.I., and his wife, the former Ann Matilda Brecken, I have learned from one source, though the Brehaut sketch suggests she was a grand daughter of a Col. Ferguson of Marshfield, which may also have been true.

Ralph Cameron told me yesterday, and Jim Cudmore confirmed for me that the uniform worn by Capt. MacDonald, at the battle of Culloden, is in the Garden of the Gulf Museum at Montague. David Stewart of the MacDonald Tobacco Company went to Montague Wednesday afternoon with Sidney Green to have a first hand look at the historic old relic.

It was back in June 1772 that "The Alexander" dropped anchor off Charlottetown, then a little village, and shortly after threaded her way up the narrow channel of the East River to Scotchfort Lot 36. She was carrying Captain John McDonald, Laird of Glenaladale with about 200 of his kinsmen.

DONALD McDONALD, brother of Captain John, had purchased Lot 36 in London the previous year and had been commissioned to sail to P.E.I., (or what we know now by that name) set up rude shelters, and arrange for provisions for settlers during the first difficult winter.

Three years later Captain John recruited "The Emigrant Highland Regiment" for the service of King George Third against the Americans in the revolution. Returning in 1776 he married, for the second time, and his wife was Catherine MacDonald, a daughter of Ranald MacDonald, and it was their third son who became the father of Sir William Christopher.

Family Break's Effect On Career

WILLIAM C's early education was received in the country school where the teacher was his uncle, Rev. John MacDonald, who had been educated in Paris. Both his father and grandfather laid great stress on education, a trait of the Scots, and William would doubtless have become a member of the Roman Catholic clergy except for a serious break in relations with his father when he was 16 years of age.

The family tradition had been that one son in each generation should enter the priesthood, and as a boy he had served as an acolyte in the church at Tracadie, but following the quarrel with his father, any idea there may have been of him entering the priesthood ended.

It is apparent that the young man became an apprentice - the rules were terribly strict in the early days - and this coupled with inability to get along with his father led to his separation from the family hearth.

A SHORT visit to Quebec and several years in Boston was but a preview to William and a brother whose name I have been unable to learn, setting up shop in Charlottetown and they shipped goods to Boston.

It was in 1859 that MacDonald Brothers set up in Montreal where they became engaged in a most profitable tobacco trade which flourished from the start, the story explains, "due to a jealously guarded recipe for making chewing tobacco". The old story adds that the success was aided materially by the outbreak of the Civil War in the United States as the soldiers chewed large amounts of the black twist.

William invited his mother and sister, Helen in 1869, to come to live with him in Montreal and he purchased a home at No. 3 Prince of Wales Terrace on Sherbrooke Street, only a few steps from McGill University and he lived there for the remainder of his life. He died June 9, 1917 at the age of 86.

### Large Gifts To McGill University

IT WAS probably his proximity to McGill University, suggests Mrs. Brehaut, that prompted Mr. MacDonald in 1891 to begin his long list of generous gifts to that university. They include matriculation scholarships and numerous buildings. There were the chemistry building, the physics and engineering building; Macdonald Park, several professorial chairs, student scholarships and finally its agricultural school, Macdonald College.

In 1883 he was named chairman of the board and chancellor. He was knighted by Queen Victoria in 1896 and changed the spelling of his name from McDonald to Macdonald.

In 1887 the Island born man became associated with James W. Robertson, Dominion commissioner of agriculture and dairying and this association did a great deal for Eastern agriculture.

Their basic idea was simply "improvement of education at the primary and secondary levels and improvement of the fundamental institutions of home, farm and school."

CONSOLIDATED SCHOOLS were established through the Maritime provinces with one located at Mt. Herbert, near Charlottetown that opened in 1905. Agriculture, domestic science and manual training were taught and they had rifles and ammunition

which the boys used in rifle shooting practice at "Jim Hen" Judson's range in the Alexandra area.

The late J. Walter Jones, principal of the school, served successively as premier, 1943-53, and as Senator from the summer of 1953 until his death early in 1954.

Sir William donated \$10,000 as incentive prizes to boys and girls across Canada for the selection of high quality seed grain as the Macdonald-Robertson Seed Growers Association was organized. The name was later changed to the Seed Growers' Association which continues to play an important role in the nation's economy.

### Macdonald College Established

TWO OF the buildings at the Ontario Agricultural College, Guelph known as the Macdonald Institute and dedicated to the training of women in scientific housekeeping were established and equipped at a cost of \$183,000.

Finally the idea of a college to advance the interests of the home, farm and school was conceived and in 1904 Dr. Robertson resigned all other duties to organize such an institution. In 1905, the necessary land, 561 acres, was purchased by Sir William and the college was formally deeded to McGill in 1906.

At the same time McGill accepted an endowment of \$2 million to be applied exclusively to the upkeep and extension of Macdonald College, and the work of the college in general.

Cost of the lands, buildings and equipment for Macdonald College was \$2,500,000 my informants state, and the college with Dr. Robertson as its first principal, accepted its first students in 1907. The first class in agriculture graduated four years later in 1911.

THE GENEROUS, public-spirited Sir William, I find, was following in the mould of his forebears in this country. An old Island history reports that the Island legislature called Capt. John McDonald to appear before it in 1797 to reprimand him for alleged shortcomings. The independent Scot ignored the summons which, apparently, was without foundation. Eight years later the legislative assembly spoke in the most glowing terms of "Captain John", and the historian notes that the MacDonalds were among the few colonizers who really lived up to the promises and arrangements they made with the people they brought to this country.

If we could only raise a modern Sir William, we just might be able to finance the development of the new university so many people are advocating here, though I often wonder where the money is going to come from.

My friend Rev. Dr. W.S. (Bill) Godfrey tells me that Mount Allison University is on a drive for \$7,500,000 to expand and renovate present facilities. Financing educational expansion is a costly business these days.

### Comments On Last Week's Column

I RECEIVED two interesting comments on last week's column. Mrs. Wilbert Cahill, city, tells me the first beater potato diggers were made by her grand uncle, Edwin Proctor, Margate who was a brother of her grandfather James Proctor, New Glasgow.

And W. D. Johnston, Montague notes with pleasure that I interview his “fine old school pal, Cyril B. Shaw”, but notes that the chief operator of the road-machine to which I referred was a Mr. Smallwood, who was one of Premier Joey Smallwood’s forebears. “If I remember correctly he owned the pole team, a beautiful pair of Greys”, Mr. Johnston writes.

He was 12 at the time - it was 1892 or 93, and remembers “Mr. Smallwood saying to a lady who was on her way to Montague on foot “Lady, how do you like that?”, referring to the work of the machine.”

“I do not like it at all”, replied the lady.

“Oh, you must be a Tory”, observed Smallwood but she replied “No but I sleep with one” recalls the interesting Montague gentleman.