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ACROSS THE ISLAND

Macdonald Papers Go Back 140 Years

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A PACKAGE of old papers concerning Sir William C. Macdonald, of whom I wrote last week, reached me by an unusual coincidence and I want to tell you about some of them. The packet came from Wallace Ward, whose father, William Ward, was for 40 years secretary, bursar and comptroller of Macdonald College which was founded by Sir William. Mr. Ward found them among his father's papers and mailed them to his friend, Burton Lewis, executive editor of this paper, who has made them available to this column.

There are so many interesting items, I scarcely know where to begin, but I'll go along with the indenture of Knighthood, since it is so unusual. I'm reproducing the letter to Macdonald from Major L. G. Drummond, secretary to the Governor General who was the Earl of Minto:

"Sir,

I have the honour by direction of His Excellency the Governor General to transmit to you herewith a packet containing the Letters Patent of Knighthood, bearing date the 5<sup>th</sup> of January, which Her Most Gracious Majesty the Queen has been pleased to confer upon you." The letter was dated February 16, 1899.

Two months previously Mr. Macdonald had received a letter from Major Drummond informing him that "a fee of two pounds, 11 shillings and four pence will be payable to the Home Office in London before the Letters Patent can be proceeded with."

The Knighthood was conferred on Sir William at the opening of some of the new buildings at McGill University to which he had contributed so generously.

Seeking Employment In New York

A LETTER from W. C. Macdonald to a New York firm in December 1851 seeking employment said in part:

"In reply to the advertisement for an 'Assistant Bookkeeper' the undersigned would state that he has been employed in that capacity in Boston for upwards of two and one-half years having a general knowledge of business, solicits the attention of the party advertising: - is 21 years of age and feels confident he can give perfect satisfaction.

"Should an interview be desired a note dropped into the Post Office will be promptly attended to."

Also going to the New York firm was a recommendation from his Boston employers, George H. Gray and Company, saying among other things:

“WE CAN recommend him to you for industry, integrity, and as capable of filling any situation for which he might represent himself qualified”, which is just about as good a recommendation as any young man could expect.

There is a receipt for three pounds for passage from Charlottetown to Boston on the schooner Swift, dated August 16, 1848. A receipt dated at Boston May 11, 1849 is for two shillings, nine pence (about 30 to 35 cents) for a bottle of brandy.

Another receipt is for \$1.50 poll tax, plus 20 cents costs from Ward Nine in the City of Boston under date of December 7, 1850. A New York receipt of \$20 is for four week's board, at \$5 a week, which would be a fairly high-class lodging at that time.

There's an invoice showing the purchase of 1,500 barrels of flour at \$2.30 per barrel on which he made a recorded profit of 984 pounds, 17 shillings and 11 ½ pence.

VALUE OF the pound in dollars and cents is not given, but I work it out to \$3.33 so the original investment of 1,035 pounds returned a profit to the young commercial man of more than 984 pounds, which is close to 100 per cent. Incidentally that pound value indicates it must have been Island currency.

### Marriage Settlement Document

ONE OF the most interesting documents in the packet was an old marriage agreement written in beautiful long hand, between Donald Macdonald and Anna Matilda Brecken, Sir William's parents.

The agreement is long, wordy and cumbersome but I want to quote a few passages to indicate the involved language which lawyers indulged in at that time. Note there is virtually no punctuation, and a generous use of capital letters.

Dates, for example, were indicated like this:

“An Indenture bearing date the day next before the day of these presents for the term of one year commencing from the day next before the day of the date of these presents”.

The settlement conferred on Anna Matilda Brecken from the said Donald Macdonald the sum of 200 pounds annually plus some 200 acres of land “by the name of St. Martins within the bounds and lines intended and described in the same deed of instrument being parcel of Lot or Township Number thirty-five (35) in Bedford parish and Queens County in the said Island TOGETHER with all Houses Buildings Gardens Orchards Land Tenements Meadows Pastures Feeding Ways Waters Watercourses Woods and Underwoods. . .

“IN TRUST to permit and suffer her the said Anna Matilda Brecken for and during the term of her natural life in case she shall outlive and survive the said Donald McDonald to receive and take to her own and sole separate use out of the rents issues and profits of the said Lands Hereditaments and Premises or such part thereof as she shall appoint for that purpose One Annuity Yearly Rent or Sum of two hundred pounds of lawful Current Money of the said Island payable half yearly upon her own receipt without the control of any aftertaken husband.”

A huge document, the agreement contained thousands of words, many of them almost impossible to understand in relation to present day language. Some of the

younger people around the office suggest that marriage settlements must have been awfully involved in those days. Naturally they prefer modern methods.

There is also an old pass which was to admit the bearer to the Legislative Council on Thursday the 10th day of February 1853 and it was signed by Donald McDonald, the Council president.

### Made Potato Diggers, Cow Bells

S. ALFRED WEATHERBIE, Cumberland Street tells me "My greatgrandfather Weatherbie who was born in 1815, invented "the Weatherbie digger" and it was known by that name for many years.

"I saw one about 35 years ago. It was a beater digger with a plough front which ploughed out the potatoes, and the beaters tossed them out of the furrow.

"He invented several things and Richard Creed, Albion told me his father once saw a gear-shift lever that Greatgrandfather exhibited at Georgetown." Mr. Creed had suggested the device should be kept secret until he could secure a patent, but an American visitor to the fair saw the equipment and soon afterwards the same thing came out with a patent, Mr. Creed told him.

At that time farm machines were not equipped with levers for shifting gears "which was strange because the device was simple", Mr. Weatherbie observes.

BACK IN 1851 Mr. Haszard gathered up some exhibits to send to the Crystal Palace Exposition in London, England and the Weatherbie man had sent several.

"My Greatgrandfather was trained by a Swiss bellmaker and also a blacksmith. A great many Island blacksmiths learned their trade from him", Mr. Weatherbie tells me.

His cowbell was a very simple thing; it didn't just clunk, but had a carrying bell tone and could be heard and distinguished as far away as one mile or more. People came long distances to buy those bells and there still are a few left who remember them", Mr. Weatherbie assures me.

The cow bells played an important part in the farm life of the past. Then cows would go to the woods to forage at times, or some other place where they had to be hunted and rounded up for milking time. A distinctive bell tone was an invaluable aid in locating the herd, though there were a few wise old bell-cows that could stand so almost perfectly still after they had finished grazing, that it was almost impossible to find them.

### Penmanship, History Competitions

MRS. FRANK Ross, Parkdale tells me there has been an utterly fantastic response to the Centennial penmanship competition for which she has been receiving entries, and she's hoping for a good response to the district history competition also.

Her house must have been half full of letters from the almost 5,000 entries in the penmanship competition which involves Grades 1 to 12 - there were 651 from Grade VI alone - and judge Henry MacLean of Vancouver will have a mammoth task sorting them out.

The history competition involves pupils of Grades VI and VII, and the students must have the active co-operation of parents and other adults in the district to do a good job, though the research is the pupil's responsibility.

It would be unfair to divulge details but I have learned that some novel ideas are developing for depicting the district history in most interesting and colorful fashion.

Deadline for entries is April 30.