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DEDICATION ........................................................................ 7
PREFACE ........................................................................ 10
SIR WILLIAM ALEXANDER OF MENSTRIE (1567-1640)
M. Perceval-Maxwell ......................................................... 14
JAMES MCGILL (1744-1813)
Lewis W. Abbott ............................................................... 26
GENERAL SIR GORDON DRUMMOND OF BALLYOukan,
G.C.B. (1771-1854)
Ronald M. Sunter ............................................................. 40
ALEXANDER CRAWFORD (1785-1828)
Robert S. Wilson ............................................................ 62
A.N. BETHUNE (1800-1879)
D.C. Masters .................................................................. 79
REV. JAMES BAIN (1802-1885)
Colin M. Bain ................................................................. 92
ALEXANDER SOMERVILLE (1811-1885)
Elizabeth Waterston ......................................................... 100
JOHN HILLYARD CAMERON (1817-1876)
Hereward Senior ............................................................. 116
HUGH GUTHRIE OF GUELPH (1866-1939)
J.A. McIntyre ................................................................ 136
WALTER MURRAY OF SASKATCHEWAN (1866-1945)
D.R. Murray ................................................................ 151
KNOWLES OF GALt (1868-1944)
Ian Campbell ................................................................. 163
JOHN BUCHAN (1875-1940)
Janet Fyfe ..................................................................... 177
SOME SCOTS: SHAPING CANADA

Some Scots: Shaping Canada

This volume of Scottish Tradition is dedicated to Professor W. Stanford Reid, founder of the Canadian Association for Scottish Studies and former Chairman of the Department of History at the University of Guelph. This special issue has been edited by J.A. McIntyre and Elizabeth Waterston, both of the University of Guelph.
Dedication to
William Stanford Reid

When Dr. Stanford Reid came to the University of Guelph in 1965 as Professor of History and Chairman of the Department of History he had already twenty-five years of teaching at McGill University behind him. Born in Montreal in 1913, Stanford Reid had completed his B.A. and M.A. at McGill University by 1935 before proceeding to Philadelphia where he studied theology at the renowned Westminster Theological Seminary (Th.B. in 1938; Th.M. in 1938), and then proceeded to complete the requirements for the Ph.D. degree in history at the University of Pennsylvania in 1941.

At that point, aged twenty-eight and with five earned degrees, he might well have decided to make his career as an ordained minister or as a professor of history. In the event, he did both. He served McGill University and The Presbyterian Church in Canada with loyalty and distinction for twenty-five years. By 1965 he had received numerous research grants, had published several significant books and scores of substantial articles on a wide variety of subjects. At the age of fifty-two he had achieved a record that many academics hope to have by retirement. In these circumstances, some people would be inclined to take the easy path and slow down.

It is characteristic of the strong Scottish nature of this man that the years at Guelph, from 1965 to 1978, were years of renewed effort and expanding horizons. A newly-established Faculty of Arts needed senior scholars like Dr. Reid to establish a proper academic atmosphere. At the University of Guelph, he launched new enter-
prises, carried a heavy load as a teacher of undergraduates, directed numerous graduate dissertations, served on the University Senate and on various committees, while at the same time pursuing his program of research and publication. He recruited able scholars and helped to create a Department of History that would stand comparison with any in Canada. The university library was one of his great concerns and through his imagination and initiative special collections of books and manuscripts relating to Scottish and Canadian history were acquired. The vigour of this man and the quality of his work have been a constant inspiration to his colleagues as well as to the thousands of students whom he has taught.

Apart from fellowships and scholarships, he has been awarded at least fifteen important research grants from such agencies as The Canada Council, the Secretary of State, The British Council, the Government of France, and the American Philosophical Society. He has presented scores of papers to conferences, published close to one hundred articles and reviews, and produced eight important books plus chapters in several other books. His scholarly contribution is simply outstanding, in its breadth as well as its quality.

Although his special field of interest is the Scottish Reformation and the history of Scotland, Dr. Reid’s published work has included such major books as the Economic History of Great Britain (1954), and Problems in European Intellectual History (1954). He has also written about outstanding Canadian Presbyterians (Called to Witness 1975) and about the early struggles of The Church of Scotland in Canada.

Two of his most noted books are Skipper from Leith: The Life of Robert Barton of Over Barnton (1962) and Trumpeter of God, a Biography of John Knox (1974). In these thoroughly documented biographies he reveals his grasp not only of the historical contexts but of the distinctive genius of the individuals portrayed. Especially in the book on John Knox, Stanford Reid’s talents as a historian and theologian are impressively displayed. Friends of Stanford Reid would add to this account of his accomplishments a note on the constant help he has received in research, in his travels, and in his writing from his gifted wife Priscilla.

It would be impossible to mention the complete range of Stanford Reid’s scholarly writing but at least a reference must be made to the fact that he has contributed numerous articles to The Catholic Historical Review, to Church History, to The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church, and the The Reader’s Encyclopedia of English Literature, as well as to journals in Britain, France, and Holland.

Finally, to come back to the Guelph years 1965-1978, it must be said that it was Stanford Reid’s initiative that led to the formation of The Scottish Colloquium, the Conference on Scottish Studies and The Canadian Association for Scottish Studies. He developed the special collections in the university library, including the Jacobite Collection; he encouraged graduate students to do doctoral theses on Canadian-Scottish Themes; he created an enduring centre of interest in things Scottish in the city of Guelph, founded in 1827 by that intrepid Scot, John Galt.

In a technical sense, Dr. Reid “retired” in September 1978 but his involvement in the graduate program in history remains and his influence is still present in a wide spectrum of university activities which he helped to launch. As a true “university man” his interests have led him into many disciplines and like Francis Bacon he feels that “all knowledge was his province.”

As a minister of the gospel, a theologian, an inspiring preacher, a leader in church councils; as a teacher, scholar, and writer; as a man of energy and vision who leaves institutions larger than they were when he came to them – in these and in many facets of his personal life, Stanford Reid embodies the finest elements in the Scottish tradition. But always he has been thoroughly and passionately Canadian.

M.H.M. MacKinnon, Ph.D.
Professor of English
University of Guelph
Preface

Scots have played a part in most Canadian matters since this country's history began: an inordinate part, according to hostile observers; a divinely predestined part, according to some Scots; a fascinating part, as it may seem to us, modern observers of Canada's unique story. Both the greatness and the limitations of the Scots become clearer as we trace some individual life stories of Scots-Canadians in politics, education, the arts, the church.

This book is a collection of such life-stories. The lives represent part but not all of the range of Scots who helped make Canada what it is. We present a soldier, a merchant, two politicians, an educator, a journalist, a novelist, a lawyer, three ministers. We add as a frame the story of the first Scot to engineer colonization of Canada on humanistic principles, and the biography of one of the last Scots to come to the Dominion as Governor-General. We are missing a representative of the medical and scientific Scots, the musical and theatrical Scots; and we include no single story of the Scottish women who contributed so much not only in home and church but also in law, medicine, politics.

The essays vary in style and mood. Appropriately so: Scots have baffled the world by their range, from canniness to the follies of mad loyalties; from covenanting piety to crass commerce; from burgher sobriety to the drunken address to a thistle. And in Canada - in so many ways an expanded version of Scotland - the Scots expanded and their extremes of mood intensified. The dour became more dour in Canada, the daft more daft; the sober turned sombre, and the drunkard stumbled to death in a snowdrift. But conversely, the Scottish virtues shone more gallantly in the Canadian air. Through this variety of good and bad, through the range of their spheres of influence, of energies, of foibles, individual Scots helped build a country of vigorous contrasts.

We begin with three men of action, who helped establish early patterns of government, business, and military force in Canada. Each in his own way faced danger and each was an innovator, stubbornly opposing the conventional wisdom of his time. Sir William Alexander undertook, in the reign of Charles II, an enterprise in colonizing North America "that was fraught with risks and cost him dear." James McGill, one of "those who had seized control of the colony's most important enterprise," was fur trader, politician, businessman. His own life demonstrated the "dilemma of French-English dichotomy," in his marriage, his business, and in the famous bequest of land for an English university in the heart of a francophone city. The aggressive tactics of General Sir Gordon Drummond at Lundy's Lane, at Niagara, and (less successfully) in his night assault on Fort Erie turned the tide in the war of 1812-1814.

The second sphere of action represented by the Scots in this book is theological. Scots in Canada have been leaders in all Christian sects, from the earliest days. The biographies included in this book cast light on three men varying from flamboyance to quiet persistence. All shared the passionate conviction of the primacy of spiritual commitment in the life of the community, the province and the nation.

Alexander Crawford brought the excitement of theological battle to Prince Edward Island, with his version of the Baptist faith. In Upper Canada, A.N. Bethune, a native Canadian from Glengarry, took the surprising step of converting from Presbyterianism to Anglicanism, ultimately becoming Bishop of Toronto. As minister of a small town Presbyterian church, the Rev. Mr. James Bain's concern with social distress and his desire to minimize sectarian divisiveness helped establish the British character of Canadian institutions: "a man of intelligence, energy, and compassion."

Third, we turn to political life. Again the Scots presented here vary in political colouration but are like in conviction and consistency. Alexander Somerville, peripatetic journalist, reform-minded projector, was a strange colorful figure on the fringes of public life during a long and turbulent career. Closer to the centre of politics was John Hillyard Cameron, arch-rival of John A. Macdonald, potentially a great leader in the Confederation era. Hugh Guthrie, MP for Guelph, three times took a stubborn, principled stand on
controversial issues. His position is still argued in modern discussions of the constitution, and in Canada's emergence as an independent nation.

Finally, we turn to the arts and to education - fields where Scottish names still predominate, long after the Scottish segment of Canadian life has been outweighed by other ethnic groups. Walter Charles Murray was a pioneer in Western education. He built into the emerging University of Saskatchewan something of his own interest in combining technology and the humanities. R.E. Knowles, best selling novelist, was also the minister of a church in Galt.

His books caught the essence of conservative village life, the small town ethic so much a product of Scots clannishness. John Buchan's novels had popularized the alternate mood of Scots: the wild love of adventure, the romantic adherence to a cause, the rugged love of nature in her wilder moods. When Buchan came to Canada as Governor-General, he would add one novel to his list, set in the Canada farthest from Ontario villages, the Canada of the fierce north. Buchan would add also a fine example of public life, private courage, and commitment to Canada - like that of all these other Scots - the commitment of a "passionate Canadian."

"Passionate" is not a term commonly applied in stereotype to Scots. "Dour", yes, and "canny", yes, or "pawky" - but the idea of passion seems at first an unlikely epithet for people thought of as solemn, serious, tightly self-controlled. Yet passionate the Scots were, and are: passionate for causes (often lost), passionate in religious allegiance, passionate in political ambitions and ideals. Perhaps we can add another adjective on the base of the particular stories to be presented here. "Thrawn" is a good Scots word meaning stubborn, unyielding, obstinate. The bad side of the thrawn quality appears in Scottish disputatiousness. The good side is in the determination to overcome, to persist, to prevail. The Scot works consistently from principle. He is less in sympathy with those values so much admired today - flexibility, plausibility, adjustment. If those values dominate our life increasingly, that may be a sign of the diminution of Scottish influence.

Scots have spent little time trying to define themselves. They accept jokes about their penury and penny-pinching; they persist in their sentimentality and conviviality without feeling compelled to theorize about the ethnic bases of these qualities. But the modern world is aware that there is a "Scottish" element and it may well regret its diminution. We need the reminder, perhaps, of the lives of past Scots, thrawn, passionate, in defeat and obscurity, or in success and victory.

Several books published in the past have dealt with the Scottish element in Canadian life: Rattray's The Scot in British North America, Murray Gibbon's The Scot in Canada, and most recently, The Scottish Tradition, edited by Stanford Reid.

The present collection began as a tribute to Stanford Reid, who has been friend or colleague or teacher of all those who contributed essays. Educator, theologian, administrator, Stanford Reid has himself played many of the roles exemplified by the men whose stories are told here. This book, initiated to honour Stanford Reid on the occasion of his retirement from the University of Guelph, confirms the belief that Dr. Reid has preached so often - that being Scottish matters, and has mattered throughout Canadian history.

J.A. McIntyre
Elizabeth Waterston
1981