

Rock PICTURES by L.W.S.

- 1) Unexplored Lands Pink and Blues.
 - 2) Enchanted Canyon River with big sun.
 - 3) Rampant Fury Volcano Red etc.
 - 4) Unspoiled Nature Rainbow.
 - 5) Final Fury. Snow
 - 6) Dawson Boundary Post Showing Post
7 - close-up of # 6 on boundary line
between Yukon & B.C.
- Original Paintings
are held by the
W-S family. A.B.

McGill's campus was once a farm. And long after it ceased to be a farm it still had a garden. This garden was kept by McGill's great Victorian principal, Sir William Dawson.

The idea of a McGill principal having a garden of his own on the campus sounds strange today. But many old accounts refer to it. Passers-by could see the principal's head bobbing up and down, as he worked among his flowers.

I often wondered just where Principal Dawson's garden was, in relation to the campus as it is today. To find out, I appealed to Mrs. Lois S. Winslow-Spragge. She told me at once; she knew because Sir William Dawson was her grandfather.

The upper part of the garden, she said, was marked by a wire fence along by the sidewalk in front of the East Wing of the Arts Building. In that fence was a little gate. It led to a path down the steep slope. The garden extended over the flat ground in front of the Macdonald Engineering Building. There it was enclosed by a hedge with shiny leaves, like holly leaves.

Mrs. Winslow-Spragge recalled that the garden proved useful to Lady Dawson. It served her needs when she was preparing for a reception. Some of her children would be sent out to the garden to bring back pieces of trailing clematis. These pieces were used as decorations for the table.

Out in the country

The recent death of Mrs. Winslow-Spragge has severed one of the last living links with the days of Sir William Dawson. She was a marvellous source of reminiscences of that era, and was very kind in allowing me to call upon her, notebook in hand. We would talk over tea. Always she arranged to have tea at the dining room table. She wanted me to be conveniently placed for taking down my notes.

Mrs. Winslow-Spragge was a very close link with Sir William Dawson. Her mother, Anna Lois, was Sir William's elder daughter. Anna Lois was four and a half years old when her father, then 35, left Nova Scotia to become McGill's principal.

William Dawson had never seen McGill until he arrived to be principal in October, 1855. He found the campus an unfenced common. Cattle wandered over it, cropping the grass, browsing among the shrubs.

His residence was part of the East

Wing of the Arts Building. It was in "an indescribable state of dust and disrepair," and "destitute of nearly every requisite of civilized life." Campus and residence could be reached from town only by a circuitous and ungraded cart-track. At night the track was almost impassable.

Mrs. Winslow-Spragge remembered hearing her grandfather tell her of his difficulties in getting in the household provisions. At that time the city lay close to the river. Notre Dame and St. James were the main shopping streets. Principal Dawson said he had been obliged to carry away with him all his purchases. Shopkeepers said they were sorry, but they could not be expected to deliver goods in the country.

Summers at Métis

By the time Mrs. Winslow-Spragge was old enough to have her own lasting memories of her grandfather, he was in his old age. Many of her most vivid memories were about family life in Little Métis, where Sir William had a cottage.

Much of his time was spent in scientific research, dredging in his boat for varieties of mollusca. Mrs. Winslow-Spragge remembers going out with him.

Starfish, sea urchins and flat fish (known as "flukes") would be brought up in his dredging. Holding them before her in his hands, he would explain what they were. She gazed in curious but apprehensive wonder.

Sir William, as she remembered, him in those days, was a stalwart man, with the Victorian's beard, then grown white. Always he wore a black hat — "a sort of shny black panama." He liked children. His voice and manner were gentle, polite. He never raised his voice.

Deeply religious, he did his best to instill a knowledge of the Bible in his grandchildren. They were offered a prize of five cents. To win, they would have to memorize a verse in the Bible and recite it to him correctly.

At once they perceived a chance of making money. They scanned the Bible for as many short verses as possible. "Yes, you've done it well," their grandfather would say. Sometimes they went away with a nice little pile of nickels in their hands.

All the grandchildren were taken to church — the Presbyterian Church at Little Métis (open in July and August), or to the Methodist Church at other times. Sir William would hire a carriage from "McLider's." It had a fringe around the top and good springs. When they all got in, it was at times so crowded that his granddaughter Lois often

sat on one of Sir William's knees, while one of her sisters sat on the other.

Industrious professor

Mrs. Winslow-Spragge's father, Bernard James Harrington, was one of the professors Principal Dawson depended on most in the development of the university.

Prof. Harrington was descended from one of the families of United Empire Loyalists who settled at St. Andrew's East, in the Quebec county of Argenteuil. The family farm, where he was brought up, later came to him by inheritance. For a time he hired a farmer to run it for him. Results were unsatisfactory. Finally he sold the farm, after a bull had charged a neighbor's house.

He acquired a summer house, near Sir William's, in Little Métis. Like Sir William, he was a resourceful gardener. The Harrington garden at Little Métis was described by the Montreal newspaper, The Witness, as "always one of the delights of the place." His flowers, sent to Montreal for horticultural exhibitions, won prizes.

At McGill he taught mining, metallurgy and chemistry. As a young professor, he was often at the principal's residence. He married the principal's elder daughter in 1876. It was a marriage Sir William thoroughly approved.

Like Sir William, Prof. Harrington believed that in McGill's development "progress would inspire hope." It would not be enough to wait for things to happen; something would have to be done to make them happen. When funds were not available to purchase needed scientific equipment, Prof. Harrington made some of it himself.

One day, demonstrating an experiment to his students, the equipment exploded. Startled students gazed while the major piece of the equipment bounced against the ceiling. When it descended, Prof. Harrington caught it in his hands. "I always do it this way, gentlemen," he remarked.

"Play the Phoenix!"

The Harringtons lived in town in a house on Walbrae Place, off University Street. Mrs. Winslow-Spragge remembered the great fire in the nearby Macdonald Engineering Building, early in April, 1907. She was then about 17 years old.

That morning she woke up early. Flames were giving the sky a fluctuating brilliance. Her brother was at the door. "Awful fire at McGill," he called out. "Want to come?"

Together they went out onto the plank sidewalks of University Street. It was raining, freezing, very slippery,



Sketch of Prof. Harrington in front of the Engineering Building

They came into the campus by the Milton St. gate and mounted the slope to the front of the East Wing of the Arts Building. From this elevation they commanded an awesome view.

Flames flapped and roared in the whole Macdonald Engineering Building. Pages from books and papers, forced up by the heat, went flying away on the wind.

Professors and students were doing their best to save anything they could. In this improvised salvage crew they could see Professors Evans, Cox and Penhallow.

One fact remaining in Mrs. Winslow-Spragge's memory was that these professors were all that morning without collars — an unheard of thing in that

day when all professors wore collars and stiff collars at that, often.

Two weeks later fire came again. This time it was most Medical Building that was lost and suspected.

Word of McGill's losses was Dr. William Osler, McGill's eminent medical graduate, at that the University of Oxford. He a three-word cable: "Play the Phoenix!"

Like that fabulous bird, the McGill rose from its ashes. Macdonald Engineering Building signed by the McGill professor, Percy Nobbs. He Phoenix carved into it. Yet there today.