

HISTORICAL NOTES ABOUT THE
MONTREAL CLINICAL SOCIETY AND
THE BEGINNINGS OF THE JEWISH
GENERAL HOSPITAL

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- 1/ ADDRESS DELIVERED AT THE ANNUAL
MEETING OF THE MONTREAL CLINICAL
SOCIETY MAY 20, 1976
AT THE CONSTELLATION HOTEL
- 2/ THE GOLD-HEADED CANE
- 3/ FIRST ANNUAL DINNER MEETING OF THE
MONTREAL CLINICAL SOCIETY
BUCHAREST RESTAURANT, MAY, 1938

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As you have just learned, my part in this evenings programme concerns aspects of being a physician in this region of Canada at sometime in the past.

Let us start with the problem of entering medical school at the turn of the century. As Jewish children attended English schools, McGill rather than Laval, later renamed University of Montreal, was the usual choice. Of course, those who ^{had} earned a Bachelor of Arts degree or who had passed the McGill matriculation exams after high school merely had to apply and they were assured of being accepted. In some rare instances, a student who had neither of these qualifications could take examinations provided by the Quebec College of Physicians and Surgeons equivalent to the matriculation requirements. An important pioneer in general surgery in our Jewish Community had to take this third route into McGill. The circumstances underwhich he chose to study medicine are about as follows: Professor A.E. Garrow, the most popular principal surgeon of the Royal Victoria Hospital and a very popular surgeon among the Jewish people, went fishing every summer to a spot in the Gaspé region called Rivière du Renard. There he made the acquaintance of an attractive young fellow named Eddie Levine who worked in the old established family business, a general store. ^{Eddie} ~~When~~ he was a very popular and

civic-minded person, he was mayor of the town before he was 23 years old. Garrow estimated that Eddie would make a good surgeon and this led to Eddie's coming to Montreal to take those exams. He devoted a year preparing for them. ^{at the age of 29,} He passed them, entered McGill and graduated in 1913. A few months before graduation, specifically in March, 1913, he led a group of five McGill students in a project of organizing a McGill chapter of the Zeta Beta Fraternity. ^{They} ~~He~~ went to Cleveland. The Upsilon chapter was formed and on their return they added to their numbers. Let me show you a picture of the group which developed by March 1917. This picture was taken shortly after the induction of the new members. Here is Eddie Levine. He was the first Jewish man to have an appointment in general surgery at the Royal Victoria Hospital and the chief put him in charge of the blood transfusion service. He taught surgery to the third year students and of course he had a thriving private practice. Here is Harry Goldblatt. We know about the Goldblatt syndrome ~~related~~ to hypertension since 1934. Not many know that Harry Goldblatt graduated at McGill in 1916, was the most popular, the most admired man in his class and he it was who delivered the Valedictory address at the graduation exercises in May, 1916. In polite language, he firmly declared that McGill had been living on Oslerian laurels and was fast becoming a second class school soon to be rated as such by the Carnegie institution. All this, in

Carnegie

the presence of the entire faculty of teachers seated, dressed in academic robes, on the platform. He recommended that no time be lost in initiating post-graduate research projects. Of course, all this had been concocted by him together with the other three G's in the class, These were Louis Gross, Alton Goldbloom and Si Grønson.

February

Louis Gross was born in 1896 and was the youngest man in the class. He was 9 months short of age 21 when he graduated with the highest honours, the Holmes Gold Medal, ^{and} ~~as~~ he promptly practised what he preached, he entered the field of research in pathology. During the next five years at McGill, he did his great classic work on coronary circulation and published the monograph on the blood supply to the heart. You know something of the remainder of his career because of the Louis Gross Memorial Lecture which came into existence after his tragic death in an airplane accident on October 17, 1937. A year later, Harry Goldblatt delivered the first Louis Gross Memorial Lecture.

Alton Goldbloom- here he is. Now, he can best be described as the grandfather of the Olympics in Montreal because his son Victor has such an important rank in this project. For me, Victor remains ~~only~~ the son of Alton who was the pioneer of pediatrics in this part of Canada. His book on the care of a child has been the constant companion and guide of hundreds of thousands of parents.

Si Greenspon was the first fully trained internist in the Jewish Community. He devoted much time and energy to research in haematology, but did not have as good luck as others in discovering any important aspects of his field.

Eddie Levine- how different things would have been in our Jewish Community if he had lived a normal span of life. Fate willed it otherwise. In 1923, he died of pemphigus, leaving a young wife with two pre-school children. Eddie Levine was not a member of our society because it was in the year 1923 that we were organized. Only recently did I learn how it started, A young practitioner, Nathan Freedman ^{Fv} ~~conned~~ ^{convinced} himself rather alone and alienated in the medical community of Montreal. He felt the need of a Jewish Group. He telephoned an older confrère Dr. Samuel Ortenberg, who agreed to lend his name to the project of organizing a medical society of Jewish doctors. In ^{April} 1923, Nathan Freedman succeeded in bringing together about 20 odd Jewish doctors at a meeting at the Mount Royal Hotel. About 15 years later, during the year that I was president of the society, we had the first annual dinner of the type that we are enjoying this evening, a meal and some entertainment and speeches. On that occasion, the entertainment consisted of ^aone man skit by Alton Goldbloom, an accomplished actor. He got dressed up as an elderly Jewish gentleman of the old school, ^{with} a beard and a Prince Albert coat, who in ~~the~~ ^{us} mixture of Lutvag English and Yiddish told ~~us~~ about his experiences in the Jewish General Hospital. He had been labeled an "interesting case". He described the various

examinations and investigations that were carried out on him including invasion of every aperture of his body as well as the creation of new apertures. All this to peels of laughter.

The other item on the program was a summary of the history of the society which I composed in the style of the "Gold-Headed Canë by MacMichael in 1823. In that book, the Gold-Headed Cane speaks in the first person singular, In my summary, the minute book of the society speaks in the first person singular. It would take half an hour to read it all but let me offer you about 5 minutes worth.

"My name is 25-R-500. Until one day in the spring of 1923, I occupied a sedate position at Granger Frères, on Notre Dame St. This was a heavenly home. The perfume of imported French books and of those published in our fair province mixed with the aroma of church incense and candles gave the atmosphere a holy air. My own pages were numbered and lined, but nothing had yet been written on them. I felt marked for life on earth, but I was in heaven, as yet unborn. Then one day in April 1923, my day arrived and I was brought into the world, in the usual manner, by an obstetrician. As he took me out through the door of Granger Frères and carried me to a destination which was unknown to me, I was not afraid. Jostled by people on the street, bumped up and down in a conveyance which he drove, my interest and curiosity were aroused, I felt alive!

That evening he exposed me at page number one and we began a long and happy acquaintance. He is a youngish man who in spite of his baldness, appears younger than his age. The blue eyes, large and frank, the blonde hair and skin tell the story of his Nordic ancestry. The high broad forehead widening as it rises, the quiet pensive expression mark him as a student and idealist. His awfully irregular, but yet not clumsy handwritting reveal the physiañ and artist. I liked him then, at first sight. I always will be fond if him. We looked at each other and then he told me about my fate. For as long as my pages presented empty lines, I would continue to attend meetings of a new medical society which he and same confrères, all of the Jewish Community, faith, race or nationality, had conceived, hatched and otherwise created.

At a meeting held in the Mount Royal Hotel, on April 10, 1923, Dr. Samuel Ortenberg, who presided, declared it was high time that such a society should be formed. Local Jewish medical men needed to get together to learn from one another. The Montreal Jewish Community had some fifty good doctors and the Herzl Dispensary, but they had no hospital. These physicians should work together in order to have a hospital built. Jewish girls with ambitions to follow the path of Florence Nightingale, need a hospital. Industrial and professional workers in all other fields of human endeavour were organizing, were uniting; the Jewish doctors of Montreal should unite. Dr. Maxwell Lightstone,

roused by these eloquent statements moved formally that all present at the meeting should organize themselves into a medical society. He was seconded by Dr. Trossman and as the motion was passed unanimously, officers were elected. Dr. Norman Viner became the president, Dr. Max Rabinovitch, vice president and my own obstetrician, friend and master, Dr. Nathan Freedman, was unanimously chosen the secretary treasurer.

The first regular meeting was held on April 21, 1923, at the Herzl Dispensary at Milton and St. Urbain streets. I remember that evening very well; I experienced fright for the first time in my life. My Master was carrying me, we had just entered through the short vestibule when I was shocked by a terrific cracking, slapping noise. My Master turned to look behind him and was reassured when he saw it was merely Dr. Trossman who arriving behind us, had shut the door. Dr. Trossman, the hearty bon vivant, is a vibrant personality and all things about him vibrate with "la joie de vivre".

This document of about 11 pages has gained some importance in our archives because that minute book which was stored in an appropriate spot in the offices at the Jewish Hospital, ~~in the early 1940's~~ ^{in the early 1940's} disappeared and this summary remains the only written record of that period. It contains the facts about how the doctors irritated and stimulated the community into action which brought into being the campaign for funds in 1929 and the opening of the hospital in October, 1934. I shall deposit a copy

Jewish General
the hospital

of this summary in the library of the Jewish Hospital. It's title will be "My name is 25-R-500". It may not be too much to remember this name if you would like to read the whole thing.

The French Jew or Jewish Frenchman, Henri Bergson, wrote a long essay entitled "Le Rire"- which deals with the philosophy of laughter. He maintains that caricature plays an important role in eliciting laughter. Eddie Levine, had the wit for caricaturing. Thus one day, when his car was out of order and we had to walk from the Royal Victoria Hospital to his home on Bishop Street near Sherbrooke (which was then the Harley Street of Montreal), he was rather annoyed at being without his car. When we reached Sherbrooke Street near Peel Street, he said, " Oh, it's ok, we have a motor, ^{~ as he} yes the foot-strong motor with the armstrong started ^x". He got into the mood for stories, and he had many and told them well, he told me about the two boys, one English and the other French who were neighbours in Cornwall. Each was unilingual but they were learning each other's language while playing. Soon afterwards, the English boy moved to Montreal and they did not see each other ^{again} until they were in their 30's. The French boy had come to Montreal and quite accidentally, they happened to meet on the ^M main street. They were very happy, they entered a saloon for a beer. Their language problem remained troublesome. At one point the English boy broke a lull in the conversation by asking "How's your brother Paul" and the French boy

gathering his words together answered "My brother Paul, she's big man in Cornwall, what you call dat, de wife of de horse, the maire, yes she is the maire of Cornwall!"

Among some of ^{my} ~~mise~~ unorthodox opinions is this one, that the best way to attain immortality is to tell a good story, to have your name always mentioned ~~when it is told~~ as the source of the story and you will be assured immortality. Eddie Levine has achieved this kind of immortality but he has also achieved immortality of a more substantial kind. Eddie and Ethel Levine brought into the world and nurtured the next speaker, ^{Dr. Robert Levine.}