

## Strathcona Trust

By Barrie Renwick

Strathcona Trust was originally a federal government program created for development of social character in children. It was introduced in schools across Canada in 1909. The program's teachings were included in each province's curriculum to provide children instruction in certain disciplines: habits of alertness, orderliness and prompt obedience. The objectives were to improve the physical and intellectual capabilities of children and also to teach boys patriotism and duty to defend the country. In the program, all children took physical exercise and elementary drill; boys over 14 years also received military training and rifle shooting in cadet corps settings. School teachers who volunteered for teaching the subjects were trained, qualified, and rewarded by a bonus system. All but one of the provinces adopted the program.

### Looking to the Future

Sir Frederick Borden was one of several Canadian government officials who, in the first decade of the 1900s, had concerns about the public's lagging interest in civic responsibilities and volunteering. These officials decided that teaching social character to rising generations of Canadian children would be a guaranteed way of avoiding similar indifference in future adult citizens. Borden, as Minister of the Militia, had good reason for his unease. Canada had no army: The Militia was the country's only home-defence and it was completely dependent on volunteers. Patriotism, fitness and a duty to serve were requirements Borden needed from every recruit for his Militia units. Instilling boys with ideals of obedience, good habits, and respect for their country would be likely to produce future recruits with character essentials necessary for the Militia. By 1908 Sir Frederick, with the support of his colleagues, was intent on having a teaching program for this purpose put into schools across the nation.

### Getting Started

Borden knew the government was unwilling to commit ongoing funding for a long-term program, so he arranged a private trust for support. His fellow statesman, Lord Strathcona, Canada's High Commissioner to the United Kingdom, agreed to put \$500,000 of his own money into a permanent trust with the Government of Canada. The money would accrue interest at four percent annually and this interest would finance the program. Lord Strathcona's conditions were that the trust's program included rifle shooting and military training for boys and that the whole program had his prior approval. On this assurance for funding, Borden encouraged all provinces to participate, and he ordered his bureaucrats to prepare the teaching materials. In 1908 they developed and published a pro forma: the *Constitution of the Strathcona Trust: for the encouragement of physical and military training in public schools* and a teaching manual: the *Syllabus of Physical Exercises for Schools*. Many of the program's teaching aids were based on materials from programs used in Britain and other jurisdictions. The program publications and the trust documents were sent to London for Lord Strathcona's approval.

At the outset, Strathcona preferred his name be left out the program, but Borden insisted that such generosity had to be recognized publicly. Personalizing the trust's title could also be

useful later in influencing others to make similar gestures. Lord Strathcona agreed and fully approved the trust program. Patrons of the Strathcona Trust were the Governor General and the Prime Minister. Its President was Sir Frederick Borden and its Executive Council was the administrative body. Canada's program was secured.

### The Legacy

From the beginning in gradually became familiar to accepted. A few vociferous exercises and drills components overly vigorous for children opinions gained little recognition; districts in one province were teaching program. The cadet provided rifle shooting and camps with military exercises. were awarded for merited assimilation of patriotism and succeeding became evident boys participated in the country's

During the Great Strathcona Trust program Prairies impoverished school student populations dropped as program went dormant. With the onset of WW II and wartime changes, there was a resurgence of the program with emphasis on cadet corps training. Boys were expected to join, and now a tri-service cadet corps offered the option of choosing which branch to train in. Fund-raising "leagues" provided support for the new sea-, and air-cadet branches. By 1950 the Strathcona Trust had shifted from a program in schools to an open corps cadet training program supporting the Royal Canadian Sea Cadets, Royal Canadian Army Cadets and Royal Canadian Air Cadets. Today, National Defence administers the Strathcona Trust in support of Cadets Canada, a national military program for all youth ages 12 to 18. The legacy continues.



1909, the school program parents and was widely critics attacked the physical as being too militaristic and especially for girls. These however, some school persuaded to reject the corps training for boys eventually included summer Medals with the trust's name achievements. Proof that the military training was during WW I when 64,000 cadet corps.

Depression of the 1930s the languished. In the Western districts closed schools when families left, and the

### The Artifact

The Strathcona Trust item accessory or badge; its actual obverse is a portrait of Lord above is his motto: *Agmina* preferred translation was Below his portrait is example is 67 mm in a copper galvano, a thin,



pictured appears to be a uniform purpose is a mystery. On the Strathcona. The legend *Ducens* for which his "In the van" [vanguard]. "Strathcona Trust." The diameter, silver-plated on open-back electrotype

shell. There is no maker's mark, but the style of the piece dates to 1910–20. The two dots in the legend (at 3 and 9 o'clock) are square-shouldered heads of thin wire pins spaced 55 mm apart; these protrude through to the back where their ends bend 90 degrees toward each other, presumably as attachments, but the pins are slim and have no provision to secure them as do lugs on military-type badges. Now a little-used method, the galvano electrotype's slow formation achieves high-quality sharpness, but production is limited to making pieces individually.

### **The Benefactor**

Donald Alexander Smith, 1st Baron Strathcona and Mount Royal (1820–1914), was a remarkable Canadian, a nation builder, a generous patron of many Canadian universities, hospitals, educational institutions and churches. During the Boer War he raised and equipped the Lord Strathcona's Horse Regiment to fight as Canada's support in behalf of Britain. Smith had come to Lower Canada in 1838, a Scottish youth who entered service with the Hudson's Bay Company as an apprentice clerk; through long years as a trader in remote posts he ultimately rose to be HBC's Commissioner in Canada and eventually its 26th Governor. He became an entrepreneur businessman with interests in a great many enterprises. At different times he was president of the Bank of Montreal, director of the CPR, and also member of a provincial legislature, a member of the House of Commons and latterly a Canadian diplomat. Through his widely varied business interests, Smith acquired enormous wealth and quietly, humbly gave vast amounts to institutions mostly in Canada; primarily for educational purposes, public health and wellbeing, and spiritual benefit. He was a passionate Canadian and fervent philanthropist. The name Strathcona appears in many uses across Canada always in tribute to the man. Smith remained Canada's High Commissioner in London well into his nineties; he died in London and was interred there at Highgate Cemetery.

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