

Apart From the Trust Fund: Some Other Contributions of Lord Strathcona to Canadian Recreation and Sport

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Donald A. Smith (1820-1914), later Lord Strathcona, was one of the richest and most remarkable men in Canadian history, and a member of that very exclusive group selected for inclusion in the Centennial publishing project entitled *Great Canadians*. Most historians have logically concentrated upon Strathcona's business-and-political career, made mention of his extensive philanthropy, but omitted reference to any significant recreational interests on his part.

Strathcona's donation of \$500,000 to stimulate a program of national physical and military training, however, has naturally attracted the attention of the chroniclers of Canadian physical education. Indeed, an individual contribution to the field of such magnitude could hardly be overlooked. With the exception of a few writers who have also briefly noted Strathcona's enthusiastic patronage of the Scottish sport of curling, this Strathcona Trust Fund is usually represented as the limit of his personal commitment to the physical welfare or sporting interests of Canadians.

Yet perusal of the Strathcona Papers in the Public Archives of Canada at Ottawa reveals that there were indeed other donations of interest to the sports historian. Although

Strathcona's monumental Trust Fund rightly endures as his most significant donation in this area, it was by no means the only manifestation of his concern for the health, physical training, recreation or sport of Canadians. When this other evidence is considered in conjunction with his Trust Fund, in fact, a more comprehensive view of this unique benefactor is obtained.

Strathcona involved himself directly in the sport of curling, both as an official, and as the donor of various medals and trophies, such as The Royal Caledonia Tankard and The Strathcona Cup. He regularly paid an annual donation of \$100 to the Manitoba Curling Club; and in 1903 he contributed \$500 to help defray the expenses of the first Scottish touring team at the Winnipeg bonspiel.

Although things Scottish were most frequently featured in Strathcona's largesse, his generosity was not completely parochial (as demonstrated by the Trust Fund itself, of course). Other diverse aspects of his sporting interests were seen in his donations to a miscellany of associations and clubs, representing such activities as cricket, snowshoeing, rifle-shooting, horse-shows and dog-shows. He invested money in The Royal Montreal Golf Club, and bought at least \$1,000 of new stock in The Montreal Racquet Club. And it was Lord Strathcona who provided \$1,000 to enable the Toronto Argonauts Senior Rowing Eight to compete in the Grand Challenge Cup at the 1912 Henley Regatta in England.

By the first decade of the twentieth-century, when Strathcona's philanthropy was a well-established and continuing Canadian fact, many sportsmen were to be found within the precincts of that rapidly-growing institution The Young Men's Christian Association. As many authors have pointed out, Luther Gulick and others had made physical activities a central and crucial feature of the Association's philosophy and programs. The Association's building movement progressed rapidly and its demands for facilities, including gymnasiums, became almost insatiable. In Canada, the YMCA found a ready and willing benefactor in Lord Strathcona, at a most convenient time. His freely-given donations on a nation-wide basis helped to consolidate this 'muscular-Christian' base in the Dominion, a fact which does not seem to have been previously recognized. Between 1911 and his death in 1914, Strathcona contributed a total of nearly \$200,000 to the YMCA in numerous Canadian cities and towns, from coast to coast, in varying individual amounts ranging from \$1,000 to \$25,000.

It can be estimated that the total amount of support given by Strathcona to concerns which reflected the physical training, recreation or sport of Canadians, is much nearer a total of one million dollars than the oft-quoted terminal Trust Fund figure of half-a-million dollars alone. Further research can determine the validity of this estimate and provide a more accurate total figure.

A call was made in 1970 for a comprehensive study which would help to provide historical analysis of the effects of the Strathcona Trust on physical education in Canada, which was felt by the proposer to be an appropriate time and method for remembering Lord Strathcona. If such an historical study pertaining to Strathcona should materialize in the future, then perhaps it need not be limited to the Strathcona Trust alone, unique and pre-eminent though it may be, but could also include reference to those other related areas which have in part been influenced by this singular man. In this way, a more balanced and fitting tribute might result, as well as a more accurate historical analysis.