

## The College and Missions: Jane Drummond Redpath<sup>1</sup>

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“REDPATH – On January 30, 1907, at Terrace Bank, Jane Drummond, widow of the late John Redpath, aged 91. Funeral private.”<sup>2</sup> Jane Drummond Redpath’s death notice stands in stark contrast to the flowery obituary at John Redpath’s passing thirty-eight years earlier. His described the large, elaborate funeral celebration and his “long career of usefulness.”<sup>3</sup> Her death notice gives no hint of her remarkable life and zeal for the cause of missions.

In an era of extravagant obituaries, why can we find few words about this woman who played such a significant role in the cause of education and missions both in Montreal and beyond? Was she a recluse, as her obituary suggests, only the “widow of the late John Redpath,” or was she, perhaps, actually a woman of stature and substance whose voice is worth uncovering?

Among historians of women circulates the adage “anonymous is a woman.” Rarely were the journals or letters of the few women who wrote preserved. It requires much research to learn about a well-known matron like Jane Redpath and her influence on the course of the nineteenth-century evangelical culture.<sup>4</sup> Historians have found that “persistent curiosity” is required “to uncover” what often turns out to be worthwhile “significant roles” that women have played.<sup>5</sup> Hints in studies referencing Jane Redpath suggest the importance of recalling her voice.<sup>6</sup>

Jane Drummond Redpath made essential contributions to Montreal’s evangelical culture in her role as mistress of the Redpath home and to the mission of the Presbyterian College, Montreal, through her leadership in

the French Canadian Missionary Society and later the Presbyterian Church in Canada Ladies' French Evangelization Society. Although it was nearly a century before women were given the opportunity to pursue theological education at Presbyterian College, history shows that Jane Redpath shared in the early vision of women's education. She gave direction to the Montreal Ladies' Educational Association established in 1871 with strong support by Presbyterian academics, including McGill Principal William Dawson and Presbyterian College Principal D.H. MacVicar.

Born in 1815 in Edinburgh to Margaret Pringle and George Drummond, Jane was raised with several siblings in a Presbyterian home of influence.<sup>7</sup> George Drummond, expert in stone masonry and the founder of a successful contracting building business, was a political presence on Edinburgh City Council.<sup>8</sup> Among his apprentices were his brother Robert and John Redpath.

When Jane was still an infant, the Drummond household gained a permanent link with Britain's North American colonies. It was a time of great unrest in the British Isles with tens of thousands of soldiers returning to seek employment after the Napoleonic Wars. George's brother, Robert, and John Redpath, both skilled and qualified stone masons, set forth on the journey to the Canadas, with Robert settling in Kingston and John in Montreal.<sup>9</sup>

In summer 1834, John Redpath's wife, Janet McPhee Redpath, and his friend Robert Drummond both died from the dread cholera that took 7,500 lives in the Canadas. This fate reconnected the Kingston Drummonds and the Montreal Redpaths.<sup>10</sup>

Two years earlier, sixteen-year old Jane had come out from Edinburgh on an extended visit with her uncle Robert and his wife Margaret.<sup>11</sup> Not surprisingly, even in a time of mourning, the beautiful young Jane captured the heart of John Redpath, a thirty-nine-year-old widower and father of six, for he needed a spouse who would re-establish and manage his household.<sup>12</sup> He had gained a reputation for his work on the Rideau Canal, for his successful contracting business as a stonemason and engineer, and as a gentleman of social status and community influence. During his time of mourning, he recognized Jane Drummond's capacity for helping him to raise his family and her potential for support in building his career. He saw the companion he would need if he were further to establish his place as a solid Presbyterian in the mercantile culture shaping Montreal.<sup>13</sup>

Jane Drummond would have been schooled for marriage.

Nineteenth-century women and men expected to live in distinct worlds and were apprenticed for their respective roles. Just as her father had taught John stonemasonry, Jane would have learned what it meant to be a woman from her mother and other relatives. She would have learned the “intimacy and relational meaning” that women of the era shared “with their women friends and in their mothering,”<sup>14</sup> and she would have been schooled properly in household management. She would have learned the skills essential to wed a man of stature.

Why did Jane Drummond agree to marry John Redpath, a man nearly twice her age? We can only speculate. We know that, for women of that era, marriage was “a rite of passage,” and that although women generally had the right of choice, parents held sway. Equal to the importance of affection was the status that marriage gave women in their roles of wife and mother. “Marriage robbed a woman of personal power,” but it gained her a strong role where there was plenty of scope for leadership in the household and in moulding the minds and souls of children.<sup>15</sup> As John Redpath’s wife, Jane gained the status to be a force for good in the community. Jane would enjoy the status of matron of a ready-made family, the financial ability to sustain an elite lifestyle, and the ability to manage her own household. Jane Drummond chose the potential for adventure and for mission in a city considered a tinderbox of religious and racial tension.

An 1836 portrait by Antoine Plamondon soon after their marriage gives a glimpse of the young Jane: cultured, in the elaborate apparel of the day, and be-jewelled, but appropriately dressed in black. Her visage shows strength of character and suggests the virtues valued in the good woman: “kindness, simplicity of manners, Christian commitment, intelligence, industry, frugality, goodness, and generosity.”<sup>16</sup> John’s letter to a friend soon after their marriage suggests that life with Jane had proven to be good and hints that he had found in her a “tender wife,” an “affectionate parent,” and, most important, potentially a “steady and sincere friend,” attributes greatly valued in nineteenth-century colonies.<sup>17</sup>

By the arrival of their first child, Margaret Pringle, born 26 October 1836, John Redpath’s distinction as merchant of Montreal marked his acceptance in Montreal society.<sup>18</sup> Redpath’s position was confirmed with the family’s move to the 235-acre property of Terrace Bank, located high on Mount Royal. Mountain property was purchased by the wealthy because it was above the smoke, the pollution, and the smells of squalidness typical of an industrial Victorian city. Their new three-storey house

was one that bespoke stature with its grand hallway, drawing room, parlour, and library. The dozen bedrooms, three inside toilets, and central heating were important symbols of the Redpaths' affluence.<sup>19</sup> As mistress of Terrace Bank mansion, Jane "had to hire staff, a cook, a maid, a governess, and perhaps a butler, determine the work, and ensure that it was performed to her satisfaction."<sup>20</sup>

There were plenty of responsibilities for women of the era, but motherhood was their most important role. Servants did the cooking and cleaning, but, as mother, Jane was to bear, to nurse, and to ensure that her large and rapidly growing blended family was fed and clothed. Through giving birth to ten children, Jane learned the physical and emotional challenges implicit in motherhood.<sup>21</sup> To show the complexity of her situation, it should be noted that the span of twenty-two years of childbearing were punctuated by weddings and births in John's first family. The year after the birth of her eldest, she became a mother-in-law. Perhaps this was the most challenging event. Peter's marriage to Grace Woods, a woman Jane's own age, posed what must have been, at times, formidable challenges in being mother-in-law to a peer.<sup>22</sup>

The family's first loss was the death of ten-month old Williamina in summer 1842. This may well have taught Jane the lesson of "complete self-surrender" that advice writers of the time defined as the meaning of motherhood. Perhaps through this death and the subsequent deaths of Isabella, Charles, and Harriet, Jane was learning the "calm endurance of trials and pain and constant suffering without complaint" that "were . . . essential characteristics of good mothering." It would seem that she found an outlet in mission.<sup>23</sup> Jane's contributions to the French Canadian Missionary Society (FCMS) must have given her solace and meaning. This involvement set Jane on a path she would follow for the next forty years. Her innate strength and deep spirituality played a significant part in helping shape the evangelical culture of Montreal. These resulted in theological education and eventually gave women access to higher education.

In spring 1839, James Thompson of the Montreal Auxiliary of the British and Foreign Bible Society assembled a group of like-minded Protestant ministers and laymen to discuss how best to evangelize French-speaking Catholics. The patriot rebellions of 1837-38 led to an opening for change.<sup>24</sup> In their wake, Lord Durham recommended assimilation, but Protestant leaders believed the answer was conversion. Only by rejecting Catholicism and embracing the evangelical faith could French Canadians

be liberated to the peace and prosperity of the colonial life envisioned by evangelicals.<sup>25</sup> John Redpath and his fellow congregants of Côté Street Free Church, founded in 1844, proved to be its strongest and most generous backers.<sup>26</sup>

There were suggestions that John was following the lead of his wife. Indeed, scholars speculate that men “deferred to women in matters of religion, morality, and child rearing.”<sup>27</sup> John’s naming of Drummond Street when he ceded the property to the city in May 1842 confirms his respect for her and hints at her close association in his work.<sup>28</sup> And the 1844 report of the Ladies’ Auxiliary of the FCMS, founded in 1841, shows the sense of mission that allowed Jane to exert strong influence in women’s rights and education.<sup>29</sup> We hear her voice in their own affirmation of their work: it “almost renders it superfluous for your Committee to say that this Auxiliary is one of the main pillars upon which your society rests.”<sup>30</sup>

In the spirit of nineteenth-century upper class women, Jane seized the opportunity to engage in missions that held the hope of transforming Montreal and the whole of Lower Canada.<sup>31</sup> As a woman she could not preach the Gospel message, but she could join with other women in supporting mission to French Canadians, confident in the Society’s belief that “the improvement and conversion of the French Canadians . . . a work equally interesting and imperative,” would redeem their world.<sup>32</sup>

Jane and John Redpath assumed leadership roles in the FCMS: he as vice-president, then president, until his death in 1869; and she as committee member and president of the ladies’ work, until her resignation in 1873. Jane’s donations continued until the mission was incorporated into the French ministries of the Presbyterian Church in Canada. Her annual gift of \$30, the cost of educating a child for a year, stood large among the more common contributions of \$2.<sup>33</sup>

Central to Presbyterianism is the belief that the pulpit is the primary source of religious instruction. It was mandatory to educate good missionary preachers.<sup>34</sup> In January 1864, John and Jane Redpath gathered Côté Street friends, including McGill’s Principal William Dawson and Dr. D.H. MacVicar, for what came to be called “that little meeting at Terrace Bank.”<sup>35</sup> Their home was therefore the birthplace of the Presbyterian College – a seminary in connection with McGill – with the mission to train converts to carry the Gospel to the people of Quebec in French.

It was a vision that Jane Redpath shared as much as anyone in her home that night. The year John died, 1869, classes were being held in the

basement of Erskine Church. Viability, visibility, proper faculty, and curriculum had barely begun. No one doubted that this was a cause that John Redpath had determined would succeed.

On 8 March 1869, Jane Redpath received hundreds of mourners who paid their respects to her late husband John. Although Jane was not mentioned in Principal D.H. MacVicar's eulogy, her encouragement for the fledgling Presbyterian College, whose head was her minister and friend, continued unabated. Jane soon established the John Redpath scholarship and the John Redpath chair at the Presbyterian College.<sup>36</sup> Numerous references point to bursaries for needy and deserving students marked "Mrs. Redpath of Terrace Bank."

Her resignation from the executive of the women's branch of the FCMS was not an end, but the beginning of an even wider leadership of Montreal women in the new Presbyterian Church in Canada formed in 1875 and its French work, including the Maritimes and the ever-expanding North West Territories. There was great pride that the founding president of the Presbyterian Ladies' French Evangelization Society of Montreal – which was later to evolve into the Woman's Missionary Society – was Jane Redpath. Not many years later, the Women's Missionary Society reported to the General Assembly both the extensive activities of its French department and its care for new immigrants, its hospitals, missions, and the schools in the West, all staffed and administered by women.

In the same year Jane Redpath presided over the Montreal Ladies' Educational Association, established in 1871 by McGill Principal William Dawson. Her leadership pushed the latter until women were admitted to McGill in 1885. It could be said that her life was her sermon. Reports from the three organizations that benefited most from Jane Redpath – the Ladies' Auxiliary of the French Canadian Missionary Society, the Ladies' French Evangelization Society, and the Montreal Ladies' Educational Association – underscore her strong leadership in mission and women's education. They allow readers to hear her voice in the concerns highlighted. A French speaker herself, and a woman of means and influence, she invested in educational efforts that she and others in the French Canadian Missionary Society believed would benefit the French Catholic population and, by extension, themselves.<sup>37</sup> This ministry set the stage for her leadership role in denominational ministry to French Canadians and for higher education for elite and middle-class women.

By the time women were accepted into McGill University in 1885, Jane Redpath was seventy years old. Her decade plus as president of the

society culminated a life-time of educational mission. As a woman of her time, the responsibility would have fallen to her to educate her children and step-children in spiritual and moral values. In this responsibility, she heard a call to mission to the world in which she lived for over seventy years of her long life, serving faithfully by taking leadership in the shaping of an evangelical Protestant culture of Montreal. One can hear Jane Drummond Redpath, perhaps without a pulpit, but with the enthusiasm, intelligence, and vision that would allow her voice to continue to be heard by the generations of women who have benefitted from higher education. The idea of the need for French evangelization and Presbyterian College's ministry to French Protestants faded over time. Still, Jane Drummond Redpath's commitment to her chosen city and significant role in creating the evangelical culture that included education for women makes the "persistent curiosity" required "to uncover" the significant role that she played well worthwhile.

#### **Endnotes**

1. An expanded version of this article appears in *Still Voice – Still Heard: Sermons, Addresses, Letters, and Reports, The Presbyterian College, Montreal, 1865-2015*, eds. J.S.S. Armour, et al. (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2015).
2. "Jane Drummond Redpath – notice of death," *The Montreal Daily Star*, 2 February 1907. Her burial at Mount Royal Cemetery, Montreal, is documented. No obituary or biography is included on the site (<http://www.findagrave.com>)
3. *Montreal Witness*, 5 March 1869, cited in Richard Feltoe, *A Gentleman of Substance: The Life and Legacy of John Redpath(1796-1869)* (Toronto: Redpath Sugars, 2004), 112. See also D.H. MacVicar, *In memoriam: a sermon, preached in the Canada Presbyterian Church, Côté Street, Montreal, on Sabbath, March 14th, 1869, on the occasion of the death of John Redpath, esq., Terrace Bank* (Montreal, 1869), CIHM/ICMH microfiche series, no. 09626.
4. See Great Unsolved Mysteries in Canadian History (GUMICH) project for hints to the mystery that still surrounds Jane Redpath's family. We know that, at the time of her death, Jane had outlived all her stepchildren and all but three of her own children. See Feltoe's family genealogy, in *Gentleman of Substance*, 124-28. He noted that, "the home had been maintained for Jane by the executors of the estate" (210). Census records confirm that she lived at Terrace Bank with only several servants helping to maintain the vast home.

See Jane Redpath, "1871 Census of Canada" and "1901 Census of Canada," *Ancestry.com*; George Drummond, "1851 Scotland Census," *Ancestry.com*

5. See for instance Marlene Epp, *Mennonite Women in Canada: A History* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2008), 3-4.
6. Feltoe does a wonderful service in weaving together John Redpath's business and philanthropic enterprises with his complicated family life. On Jane Drummond Redpath, see *Gentleman of Substance*, especially 69, 118. For glimpses of Jane Redpath's contributions to Montreal benevolent work, see Lois Klempa and Rosemary Doran, *Certain Women Amazed Us: The Women's Missionary Society, Their Story, 1864-2002* (Toronto: Women's Missionary Society, 2002); Margaret Gillett, *We Walked Very Warily: A History of Women at McGill* (Montreal: Eden Press Women's Publications, 2005), 52, 61; and J.S.S. Armour, *Saints, Sinners, and Scots: A History of the Church of St. Andrew and St. Paul, Montreal, 1803-2003* (St. Andrew and St. Paul, 2003), 125.
7. With women's lives having been largely confined to the domestic sphere, historians of women have proposed a life cycle approach. See Veronica Strong-Boag, *The New Day Recalled: Lives of Girls and Women in English Canada, 1919-1939* (Toronto: Copp Clark Pitman, 1988).
8. See Jane Redpath, "1871 Census of Canada" and "1901 Census of Canada," *Ancestry.com*; George Drummond, "1851 Scotland Census," *Ancestry.com*.
9. Feltoe, *Gentleman of Substance*, 11-12.
10. Feltoe, *Gentleman of Substance*, 36-41, 125.
11. Jane Errington, *Wives and Mothers, School Mistresses and Scullery Maids: Working Women in Upper Canada, 1790-1840* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1995), 6; and Feltoe, *Gentleman of Substance*, 39.
12. Feltoe insists that they respected the obligatory year of mourning, dictated by nineteenth-century society. See *Gentleman of Substance*, 40-43.
13. Feltoe, *Gentleman of Substance* 37; and Errington, *Wives and Mothers*, 82.
14. Nancy M. Theriot, *Mothers and Daughters in Nineteenth-century America: The Biosocial Construction of Femininity* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1996), 37; see also 32, 63 and S.J. Kleinberg, *Women in the United States: 1830-1945* (Houndmills: Macmillan Press, 1999), 14.



15. Theriot, *Mothers and Daughters*, 24, 34. See also Errington, *Wives and Mothers*, 7, 28-29, 31. Errington asserts that scholars estimate that ninety per cent of women in Upper Canada married.
16. Antoine Plamondon, *Jane Drummond 2nd wife of John Redpath 1815-1907*, 1836, M994.35.2 McCord Museum, Montreal, QC; and Errington, *Wives and Mothers*, xii.
17. Errington, *Wives and Mothers*, xii; Feltoe, *Gentleman of Substance*, 50. See also Theriot, *Mothers and daughters*, 35, on the important role that the home took for men such as John Redpath.
18. St. Paul's Church Registers, 1994.4012.7.5, Church of St. Andrew and St. Paul, Montreal Church Archives cited in Feltoe, *Gentleman of Substance*, 48-49.
19. Feltoe, *Gentleman of Substance*, 49, 51, 55, 126-27.
20. Errington, *Wives and Mothers*, 134. Two years after John's passing, with only four children still at home, Jane had a laundrywoman, a cook, and a parlour maid. Jane Redpath, 1871 Census of Canada. See also Errington, *Wives and Mothers*, 141.
21. Errington, *Wives and Mothers*, 20-21.
22. Feltoe, *Gentleman of Substance*, 69, 120, 127-28.
23. Theriot, *Mothers and Daughters*, 4-5, 22; Errington, *Wives and Mothers*, 72.
24. Glen Scorgie, "French-Canadian Missionary Society," in *French-Speaking Protestants in Canada: Historical Essays*, ed. Jason Zuidema (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2011), 84, 89-90, 97.
25. Scorgie, "French-Canadian Missionary Society," 86, 94, 98; Richard Lougheed, "Clashes in Worldview: French Protestants and Roman Catholics in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century," in *French-Speaking Protestants in Canada*, 101-2.
26. Feltoe, *Gentleman of Substance* 70-72; John S. Moir, *Enduring Witness: A History of the Presbyterian Church in Canada* (Burlington: Eagle Press Printers, 2004), 103, 105; and Gerald Tulchinsky, "REDPATH, JOHN," in *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 9, University of Toronto/Université Laval, 2003-, accessed June 16, 2014, [http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/redpath\\_john\\_9E.html](http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/redpath_john_9E.html)
27. Theriot, *Mothers and Daughters*, 35; and Kleinberg, *Women in the United States*, 60.
28. Feltoe, *Gentleman of Substance*, 68-69.

29. Feltoe, *Gentleman of Substance*, 118.
30. French Canadian Missionary Society (hereafter FCMS) Annual Report I (1844), 22.
31. Kleinberg, *Women in the United States*, 35; Errington, *Wives and Mothers*, 21, 170, 161; Loughheed, "Clashes in World View," 101-102; and Feltoe, *Gentleman of Substance*, 69.
32. Ladies' FCMS (1841), 28. See also Scorgie, "French-Canadian Missionary Society," 79, 85, 95.
33. FCMS Annual Reports (1844-1869).
34. Michael Gauvreau, *The Evangelical Century: College and Creed in English Canada from the Great Revival to the Great Depression* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1991), 32.
35. Robert Campbell, *A History of the Scotch Presbyterian Church* (Montreal: W. Drysdale and Co. Publishers, 1887) [https://archive.org/details/cihm\\_00397](https://archive.org/details/cihm_00397), 394; Keith Markell, *History of the Presbyterian College, Montreal, 1865-1986* (Montreal: Presbyterian College, 1987), 8-9; and Lalonde, "French Protestant Missionary Activity," 165.
36. *Presbyterian College Journal*, November 1881, 14; Markell, *History of The Presbyterian College*, 10-11; and Campbell, *History of the Scotch Presbyterian Church*, 394.
37. Jane Redpath, "1901 Census of Canada."