

Poets' Pathway will commemorate Ottawa's literary history

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BY STEVEN ARTELLE

Few Canadians know the rich literary history of Ottawa. To commemorate the many writers who have shaped our city's character, the Greenspace Alliance of Canada's Capital is working to preserve the Poets' Pathway, a 30-kilometre path between Britannia Park and Beechwood Cemetery.

In 1894, Ottawa poet Archibald Lampman anticipated the inspirational purpose of this path:

"Viewed at a distance of two or three miles, from any point of the compass, (em)bosomed with its central mass of towers, (Ottawa) is one of the loveliest cities in the world. It is so placed that it can never be anything but beautiful, and as the years go on, bringing with them the spread of a finer architecture and a richer culture of the surrounding country, its beauty

will be vastly greater than it is even now. It will become the city for the artist."

Lampman's "city for the artist" had its origins in 1867, when Thomas D'Arcy McGee promoted a capital city that balanced architectural monuments with literary accomplishments. "I cordially concur in the honest pride of every inhabitant, in the strong masonry and line-style of our new edifices," McGee said, "but if stone walls do not a prison make," still less do they make a capital — a ruling city — a seat of light and guidance, and authority, to a nation or a generation.

The Macdonald government actively promoted the literary capital ideal. In 1872, cabinet minister Joseph Howe told citizens of Ottawa that they should be "ambitious to make the political Capital of the country the home of the Arts, the literary centre of the Confederacy." Macdonald boasted that he

himself "had much to do with the appointment or promotion of most of the gentlemen of the Civil Service (which was) composed of ... men of high literary culture, poets, men of science, of song and of music."

Exemplifying this casual literary patronage, poet Charles Sangster had received a Civil Service post in 1868, and Lampman worked for the Post Office Department for most of his adult life (he died in 1899, age 37).

Wilfrid Laurier also would acknowledge the importance of encouraging Ottawa's writers and artists. Commenting on Lampman's poetry in April 1890, Laurier stated: "I would be disposed to favor a liberal expenditure for a proper encouragement not only of literature but of art, and of everything that would develop a national sentiment among us."

When the Civil Service moved from Quebec City to Ottawa in 1865, francophone em-



Poet Archibald Lampman foresaw Ottawa becoming 'the city for the artist.'

ployees involved in Quebec's the capital. Writers such as Benjamin Sulte, Antoine Gérin-Lajoie and Alfred Garneau eventually formed *Le Cercle des Dix*, the capital's most prominent literary group, and participated in the Institut canadien-français d'Ottawa, which celebrates its

150th anniversary this year.

Founded by Governor General Lorne in 1884, the Royal Society honoured the nation's leading literary figures, including Ottawa's Aeneas McDonnell Dawson. One of the most interesting events in Ottawa's literary history was the poetry reading organized by the Royal Society in 1895, which featured a who's who of Canadian literature.

At this reading the popular poet Pauline Johnson joined Ottawa poets Lampman, William Wilfred Campbell and Duncan Campbell Scott, as well as parliamentary poets J.D. Edgar (the speaker of the House of Commons), and western MP Nicholas Flood Davin.

Davin's contribution to Ottawa's literary and political life is witnessed by his monument at Beechwood Cemetery, which was paid for by leading authors and politicians. Many important literary figures, including Lamman and Scott, are buried

at Beechwood. Campbell's monument at Beechwood was funded in part by his close friend William Lyon Mackenzie King.

Also buried at Beechwood are Henry J. Morgan, whose *Ribithioeca Canadensis* was the first comprehensive record of Canada's literary heritage, and Arthur Bouinot, winner of the Governor General's Award for poetry in 1939.

The Poets' Pathway will provide a unique means for discovery, where Canadians, visitors, and a new generation of writers can encounter memorials of our literary history, and the physical and cultural environment itself, the greatest memorial.

Steven Artelle is a PhD student at the University of Western Ontario who is studying

Ottawa's 19th-century literary history. The Greenspace Alliance of Canada's Capital can be reached at poetspathway@worce.ca.