

# Story of Le Mount Stephen

---

This magnificent Renaissance-style mansion was begun in 1880 for George Stephen (later Lord Mount Stephen), president of the Bank of Montreal and of the Canadian Pacific Railway. It was designed by the noted architect, W.T. Thomas and built by Montreal contractor J.H. Hutchison. Construction took three years and involved numerous craftsmen brought especially from Europe to work on its opulent interior. A fine reflection of the Victorian era, it was renowned in its day as one of Montreal's most lavishly elegant residences, and owes its survival to the Mount Stephen Club which bought the property in 1926.

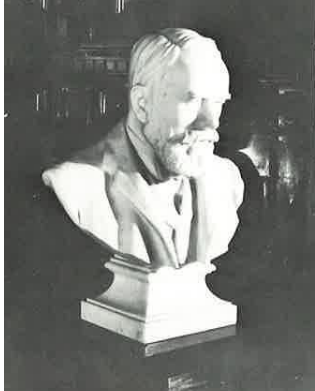
Historic Sites and Monuments Boards of Canada

*Exterior building, 1884*



## George Stephen

### A genius of confederation



*(Burst of Lord Mount Stephen in the Club Foyer)*

In the momentous Centenary Year of Canada's history, it is well to review the achievements not only of the Confederation fathers but also of those pioneers whose vision, energy and intelligent faith later made Confederation real and workable. Outstanding among these latter was George Stephen, the man who forged the steel link that physically bound our provinces into a single Canada. He certainly ranks with our greatest men.

Like so many great Canadians, George Stephen was a Scot. He was born in 1829, at Stephen's Croft, near Croftglass in Inveraven, the first son of a carpenter William Stephen and his wife Elspet Smith. Shortly after his birth, the family moved to Dufftown, a village founded by the fourth Earl of Fife in the year of Waterloo. George left school at 14 and 1844 was apprenticed to an Aberdeen draper, after which he set out for London where he learned business in a wholesale dry goods house in Saint Paul's Churchyard.

His character formation in these hard early years is indicated in the account given by Dr. Heather Gilbert, in her recent book "Awakening Continent" of George Stephen's return to Aberdeen in 1901, as Lord Mount Stephen. He received the freedom of the city at the Town House where, in the speech, he referred to those early years of apprenticeship as follows:

"I had but few wants and no distractions to draw me away from the work I had in hand. It was impressed upon me for my earliest youth by one of the best mothers who ever lived that I must aim at being a thorough master of the work by which I had to get my living, and to be that I must concentrate. I was told, my whole energies on

my work, whatever it might be, to the exclusion of every other thing....” In 1850, young Stephen set sail for Canada to join a Kingsman who had set up an importer’s business in Montreal. He soon became a junior partner and went on buying trips to England, and eventually bought out the firm. This led to important new business connections and eventually to his marriage in 1853 to Annie Charlotte Kane, daughter of the Controller of the Naval Arsenal at Portsmouth. In the two following decades George Stephen business interests in Montreal rapidly expanded to include woollen and cotton mills, and directorates in many divers companies; in 1876 he eventually became President of the Bank of Montreal. He was an ally of Sir John A. McDonald Canada's first Prime Minister, and a staunch friend of his cousin Donald Smith who was then a Labrador factor of the Hudson's Bay Company and afterwards came Lord Strathcona.



***Lord George Stephen and Mrs. George Stephen, 1884***

The 70s developed Stephen’s financial genius spurred on by the fiscal crises of that Canadian decade. This brought him squarely into the countries railway problems, for transportation was then, as it is today, a main domestic concern. The Canadian Pacific Railway founded in 1880, with George Stephen its first president leading trailers became the instrument that created I really linking Atlantic with Pacific. But it was a bitter, heart-breaking struggle at times and the hectic 80’s when only the versatile intelligence and stubborn force of George Stephen brought it off successfully. At one time, in 1885 or so, the C.P.R. actually faced bankruptcy- plague by its rivals and enemies and fluctuating money climate of the New York and London markets, to say

nothing of the political attacks of the oppositions in Ottawa fighting in McDonald's precarious support of the infant railway.

Such was his faith, however, it is eventual success that's Stephen and his associates mortgaged themselves to the hilt to pay the army of workmen feverishly pushing the rail line westward over the Rockies. His Drummond street mansion its priceless furnishings and accessories, were all pledged as this critical period to tide the struggling C.P.R. over its crisis.

But at last, what J.M. Gibbon in his history of the Canadian Pacific Railway, called "the Luer of Cathay"- the new Northwest Passage- was a reality; and the first through transcontinental train reached the Pacific in 1886. In honour of his services in creating and developing the railway, the Canadian Government in 1885 awarded George Stephen the Confederation Medal. And in 1886 Queen Victoria made him a Baronet- Sir George Stephen. In 1888, he returned to live in England where in 1889, he was created a peer of the realm with the title of Baron Mount Stephen in recognition of his many generous gifts to Canada the citizens of Montreal. He and his cousin, now Sir Donald Smith, founded in 1885 "The Montreal Scholarship" for the study of music at the Royal College of Music in London: and at about this period, they jointly donated half of \$1 million each for the building of the new hospital to be known as "The Victoria Hospital". His benevolent later years were filled with good works and the peace of seeing his early Canadian dreams fulfilled. In 1905, he was awarded the G.C.V.O. and in 1911 was made an L.L.D. of his palatial English country home. Bocket Hall, on November 29th, 1921. After his first wife died in 1896, he married the daughter of a Royal Navy officer. He had no children, but his first wife adopted a Montreal child as her own daughter eventually married a son of Sir Stafford Northcote. George Stephen's parents both died in Montreal and are buried in Mount Royal Cemetery.

Just outside the entrance gates of Bocket Hall, is a small English church and whose churchyard he lies buried; a simple tablet sums up his character: "wise in his benefactions, of stainless integrity", according to an article in 1961 by E.A. Collard, editor of the Montreal "Gazette", in his series "All our Yesterdays".





## The Stephen mansion

In the strenuous seventies, the Stephens lived in a square stone house facing on Drummond Street, on site (now demolished), at the rear of the present building. The surrounding property, then extending to Mountain Street, consisted of a great garden and lawn, rich with flowers, lilacs, roses, and fruit trees. In 1880, Stephen decided to build a more substantial mansion, now the Mount Stephen Club, in front of his house, better suited to the demands of hospitality made by his growing importance and means.

The new mansion, luxurious and elegant even for those days, took 3 years to build and complete. The architect was W.T. Thomas. An English man who practiced his profession in Montreal for some 30 years and was responsible for several other outstanding residences and business buildings of the time; he also designed St-George Church in Montreal. A prominent contemporary contractor, J.H. Hutchinson, did the masonry and main construction; he also built the Queens Hotel, Windsor Hotel, and the Board Of Trade, amongst other structures that still exist.

The rich materials, windows and furnishings, were all imported from many countries; a small army of carvers and craftsmen in wood and marble were brought from Europe. Together, on the spot they created a masterpiece of interior decoration on a lavish scale which remains largely intact today. The mansion is said to have cost \$600 000; today it's paneling, ceiling, fireplaces and appointments are perhaps worth millions as a work of art not to be found anywhere else in North America.



*The conservatory with fountain, 1884*

The great house was filled with treasure of a lifetime: the photographs give some idea of how they matched their superb room settings. It was a fitting home to receive the stream of Sir George Stephen's distinguished guests who came and went during happy, busy, and opulent years of the late eighties. In those spacious days life moved at a leisurely pace and hospitality was indeed a fine art worthy of the setting possible.

One can imagine how important business conferences were here often adroitly merged with social events in this Drummond Street palace.



*Fireplace, 1884*

Among many social functions held here during its early years, were receptions for the Duke and Duchess of Connaught in 1890; Field Marshal Earl Roberts and Countess Roberts visiting the Quebec Tercentenary in 1907; and Lord Northcote, retiring

Governor-General of Australia and Lady Northcote, in 1908.



*Garden party at the rear of the Meighen Mansion - 1908*

Lord Mount Stephen retired from the C.P.R. presidency in 1888 and went to live in England. His Drummond Street house was taken over by Mr. and Mrs. Robert Meighen and their family; Mrs. Meighen was a sister of Lord Mount Stephen. In 1919, her son was host at a dance given here for the Prince of Wales.



*Master bedroom, 1884*





*Living room, 1884*



*Grand Salon, 1884*

## THE MOUNT STEPHEN CLUB





At the time when many fine old Montreal houses were being demolished to make way for modern construction, a group of well-known Montrealers – the late Noah Timmins, J.H. Maher, and Dr. J.S.Dohan – decided to purchase the Meighen house to preserve its character and beauty for future generations. Under their direction, the Mount Stephen Club was incorporated in 1926.

The Club had been scrupulously careful to retain and preserve the beautiful appointments of the house in all their original glory: such modernization that has had to be done was carried out with the principle in mind.

Only the basement rooms, kitchens, facilities, and the original conservatory, have been changed and remodelled to meet the requirements of a modern club.

The main building is a fine example, in solid stone of Italian Renaissance architecture of the 17th and 18th century. The main portico, the mahogany entrance doors five inches thick marvellously hung and hinged, form an impressive entry into the club.

These entrance doors and side panels are adorned with hand-crafted stained glass windows representing, with quotations from four plays, figures from Shakespearean scenes. In the transom in stained glass, appear the words – appropriate for the Club: -

“True friendship’s laws are by this rule exprest,

Welcome the coming, speed the parting guest!”

The nobly proportioned Cuban mahogany staircase is an exquisite work of art in itself. Above the first landing is a huge stained glass window filtering soft light on to the ascending carved balustrades and paired columns peculiar to the whole house. The huge grandfather clock, a later adornment, gracefully commands the carpeted



stairway. The tapestries on a gold-leafed raffia base are in panels depicting figures of Venus, Amor, Juno, Minerva, Labor, Diane from ancient mythology.



*Main staircase*



### *Ceiling of the main staircase*

Off the foyer are two beautiful small lounges, used today as reading rooms. The smaller was originally Lord Mount Stephen's private study; the other was a waiting-room. The fireplace in the larger room is flanked by stained glass windows depicting the muses of Tragedy and Comedy, and of Music and Poetry.

In both rooms, the walnut window shutters fold into the window jambs and beautiful carpentry, while the windows stills are of gray marble. The walls, ornamented with tapestry, are finished in inlaid English walnut trimmed with Birdseye maple.

Everywhere in the house the doors are twice the size of modern doors and are 4 inches thick. Doorknobs, finger-plates, and hinges are 22 karat gold-plated and the keys are of gold gilt. Each room has a large fireplace carved, hand-painted-tiled, on the spot, with bevelled mirrors and solid brass accessories.

The main lounge, the original drawing room, is notable for its elaborate carved wood, and Italian onyx fireplace said to have been exhibited at the Chicago World's fair in 1897.

This great room is distinguished by its elaborate carved ceiling and walls decorated with intricately hand carved satin-wood from Ceylon of the East Indies. The main dining room has a high panelled ceiling with wainscoting and an alcove containing another beautiful fireplace. The whole room is finished in quarter-cut oak with touches of birdseye maple panelling.



At the top of the grand staircase is a large hall giving on a series of beautiful rooms once the original bedrooms of the house. The largest of these was the master bedroom. Of imposing size, its ceiling is panelled, and panelling and trim on walls are birdseye maple and mahogany. The fireplace here depicts various kinds of birds on hand painted glazed tile. The adjoining room has another particularly beautiful fireplace of yellow sienna marble and decorated doors. The wood treatment is the same as in the master bedroom. Another room upstairs, a former bedroom, has a fine panelled alcove; the woodwork in this chamber is of long cut Southern Pine. The massive bronze chandelier from Budapest was presented to the Club by Stephen Vaughan, American Vice-Consul who was in Berlin when the Allies bombed the city during the last War.



*Strathcona, Mrs. George Stephen bedroom*



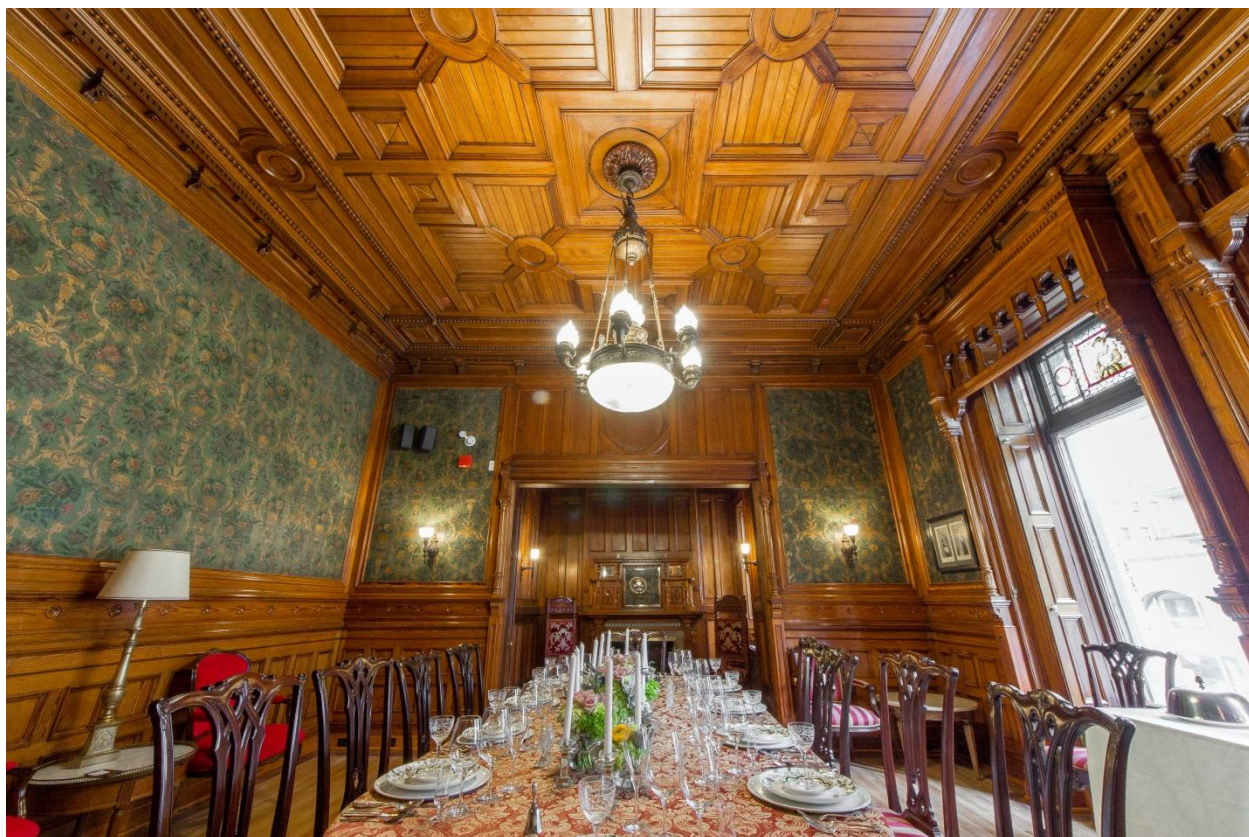
*Algonquin, guest bedroom*





*Laurentian, Boudoir of Mrs. George Stephen*





*Robson boardroom, Mr. George Stephen bedroom*



*Salon Pere Lacombe, Mr. George Stephen office*

In recent years, the Club has transformed part of the basement area to a billiard room replaced later on with a completely modern style air conditioned snack room known as the Worthington Room. The original conservatory was completely remodeled and formed the basis for a comfortable lounge for ladies; and an extension built for an elegant ladies dining room with crystal chandeliers and a central colored fountain. These quarters are now furnished in French Provincial Style and provide a contrast to the atmosphere of the main building.

Since its foundation in 1926 the Club has proved to be an elegant distinguished rendezvous for a large number of Montrealers and out-of-town members, and a meeting place of great prestige for many cultural, private, and diplomatic groups. Our roster of guests from all over the world includes the names of outstanding people in all walks of life. In 1958, Her Royal Highness Princess Margaret was guest of honor at a private dinner given by the Mayor of Montreal in the main dining room of the Club: guests included many illustrious Montrealers and government officials. In 1959, The Club was the scene of a dinner given by the Mayor of Montreal for the NATO Permanent Council to Canada. During this year also, the Mayor also gave an official dinner in honour of the Chief of the Air Staff. French Air Force, General Edmond Jouhaud, in the Club.

Many distinguished visitors have been guests at the Club. To name but one, for instance, Field-Marshal Lord Wavell, formerly Viceroy of India, spoke highly of the Club's décor and atmosphere.

For the really memorable events, the Club because possesses fine Wedgwood china, Waterford crystal ware, and hand-made Madeira placemats to provide-- In such an atmosphere the ultimate setting for gracious hospitality. It is as a rendezvous of friendship that the Club will attract a young generation of Montrealers who are still sensitive to the mellow old-world peace of one of the most truly beautiful 19th Century homes in all Canada. To them, as to all present members, the Club is a symbol of the fulfilled Confederation dream of the unseen host Lord Mount Stephen.