

though, from the ecclesiastical opposition to the plan, the Board was almost entirely English and Protestant in its composition, it proceeded to the establishment of non-denominational schools. These schools were never very numerous—about eighty being the maximum number; but they formed the beginning of the present school system. The Royal Institution, being a Government Board, had, on that account, too little of the popular sympathy, especially among the settlers in the Eastern Townships; and the Local Legislature practically refused to acknowledge it, and set up in opposition to it the denominational system of “Fabrique schools” in the French parishes; and, finally, its functions were restricted to the McGill College alone, by the new educational act which followed the rebellion of 1837.

1820⁷ In so far as the McGill College was concerned, the Royal Institution at once took action by applying for a royal charter, which was granted in 1720, and prepared to take possession of the estate. This, however, owing to litigation as to the will, was not surrendered to them till 1829. They also demanded the grants of land which had been promised, and received fresh assurances; and, as an earnest of their fulfillment, the Government of the day was authorized to erect a building for McGill College, and to defray the expenses out of the “Jesuit’s estates.” But the hopes thus held out proved illusory, and the college buildings had to be begun with the money left by Mr. McGill, and were at length completed only by the liberality of another citizen of Montreal, Mr. W. Molson.

In the year of Mr. McGill’s death, the population of Montreal was scarcely 15,000; and of these a very small minority were English. One-third of the houses were wooden huts, and the extent of the foreign trade may be measured by the nine ships from the sea, of an aggregate of 1589 tons, reported as entered in the year 1813. The whole English population of Lower Canada was very trifling. There was no school system, and there were no schools, with the exception of the seminaries of the Church of Rome, and a few private adventure schools. It seems strange that, in such a condition of affairs, the idea of a University for Montreal should have occurred to a man apparently engaged in business and in public affairs. Two circumstances may be mentioned in explanation of this. The first is the long agitation on the part of some of the more enlightened of the English Colonists