

The Hamilton Association 1880 - 1900
Public Education and Cultural Expression
in a Late Victorian City

by

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FOREWORD

The Hamilton Association and the Hamilton Public Library have always worked side by side for common goals. Even before the Ontario Free Libraries Act of 1882 made possible the establishment of the Hamilton Public Library (a little tardily in 1889) the interests of its forerunner, the Mechanic's Institute and the interests of the Hamilton Association were entwined. The Hamilton Association promoted the cause of the Free Library and its members have served on successive library boards. Dr Freda Waldon, chief librarian from 1940 to 1963, was the first woman to hold the office of president and was a driving force in the Association for at least forty years. I have followed her distantly as president and recording secretary, and a number of other librarians are members and officers. The Library holds the Archives of the Association and was the recipient of valuable books when its collections were dispersed.

It is appropriate that the Library's contribution to the celebration of the 125th anniversary of the Hamilton Association should be this little book, originating in the Special Collections Department and written by a convert to the cause of the Hamilton Association, librarian J. Brian Henley. From his reading and indexing of early issues of Hamilton newspapers he has found information which will be new to many of us.

Katharine Greenfield,
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Concerning the 2007 version of this Document

This document is a reproduction of the original 1982 booklet. The latter was scanned to produce an electronic copy. Minor stylistic changes were made to the text: full upper case style in titles was converted to mixed-case with varying font sizes; full justification style was changed to left justified; underline style was changed to italics; some end-of-line words were hyphenated. Layout was changed by removing the footer, adding a header, and moving page numbers from the footer to the header. The original wording and paragraph breaks were retained. The page breaks in the original layout are indicated in the running text within square braces (eg, “[page 1 ends]”).

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D. Keane,
HAALSA Webmaster,
September 2007.

The Hamilton Association 1880 - 1900

Public Education and Cultural Expression in a Late Victorian City

"Hamilton is pre-eminently a manufacturing and commercial city, and has more than provincial reputation as such. Nevertheless, it is not to be supposed that the best thoughts and energies of the people of this city are solely devoted to the prosecution of commercial enterprises. Though living in an intensely practical age, the citizens of Hamilton have shown that they have the taste for art, science and literature in perhaps as large a degree as many places of far higher pretensions to culture".¹

In the latter part of 1880, there was a revival of interest in the Hamilton Association, which, even at that point of time, was one of the oldest cultural organizations in the city. The objects of the founders of the association in 1857 were threefold: the study of literature and science, the illustration of the history and physical characteristics of the immediate locality and the creation of a library and museum. After some years of relative inactivity in the 1870's, the goals of the Hamilton Association once again struck a responsive chord in the minds of many of the citizens of Hamilton.

In 1880, the city of Hamilton was beginning to feel the effects of the National Policy of Sir John A. Macdonald's administration. With the introduction of the protective tariff which was designed to protect Canadian industries from foreign competition, local manufacturers were able to compete more successfully, especially with their American counterparts. Older factories were back to near-capacity production levels and many new companies were setting up operations in the city.

With economic conditions favourable and the population once more on the rise, the intellectual and cultural aspects of life in the city took on renewed vigour, especially as reflected in the number and character of organizations devoted to such pursuits.

Unfortunately, despite a large number of excellent papers having been presented to its meetings by prominent members of the community, the Hamilton Association had fallen into a period of inactivity in the 1870's. The Association had never possessed a permanent location to store the various artifacts and publications collected by its members and this was felt to be a major hindrance to the growth and prosperity of the organization.

In November, 1880, a circular was produced and sent around to the members of the semi-moribund society, inviting them to a meeting at the City Hall Council Chambers for the purpose of investigating ways and means of reviving the work of the Hamilton Association.

¹ "Hamilton Societies: the various artistic, literary and scientific societies of the city: Institutions which cater to the religious, literary, musical and educational wants of Hamiltonians". *Hamilton Spectator*, November 29, 1880.

At the meeting, various suggestions were put forward to raise the profile of the Hamilton Association in the community and to increase its membership. It was proposed to have a series of free public lectures by eminent scholars to be publicized in the city's newspapers. As a step towards increasing membership, it was suggested and carried that the annual membership fee be cut in half from two dollars to one dollar, in order to bring membership in the association within reach [page 1 ends] of more citizens. It was also suggested that ladies be allowed to join the Hamilton Association but this was not followed up.

In the first months after the November 1, 1880, revival meeting of the Hamilton Association over fifty new members had been recruited and the winter series of meetings had been scheduled. Also, a revised constitution and a new set of by-laws were drawn up and adopted. By the end of 1881, the Hamilton Association had not only been revived, but was well on its way to becoming a major scientific and cultural organization with a reputation that extended far beyond the city's limits.

At the first regular meeting of the 1881-1882 season, the retiring president, Mr Thomas McIlwraith, under whose leadership, the Hamilton Association's activities had been revived, occupied the chair. After thanking the membership for their kindness and support during the previous season, he introduced the incoming president, Dr J.D. Macdonald.

Dr Macdonald's inaugural address, titled "The Benefits of a Scientific Association", was an analysis of what role the Hamilton Association should play in the city's cultural affairs: "it is by no means the purpose of the association to constitute as members 'a select few'. The friends who had the most to do with its formation, or rather say, its reconstruction, are guided by a desire to spread through the community a taste for inquiry, to cause the growth of a desire for accurate knowledge on certain topics, as imperfect, inadequate information regarding which is highly prejudicial, we may say dangerous".

"May I not say too, that it is the desire of the association to aid in the recovery of our people from the impetus with which we have committed ourselves to a course of self-indulgence, of frivolity and dissipation in late years. These are vices which, in past times, characterized chiefly the extremes of society; now, they threaten to corrupt the whole social fabric.... We may hope that such an association as this of ours, if it have a successful history, will be among the means of giving a more healthy turn to the minds and to the manners of us all, especially of the young, to show us not only that life is worth living, but that it is worth living earnestly."

1883 was a milestone year in the history of the Hamilton Association. The organization was formally incorporated on the twentieth of January of that year. Also, 1883 was the year that the association, with the help of John M. Gibson, local Grit MLA, was able to procure an annual grant of \$400 from the province. The money was to be used to promote the Association's work, especially by the annual publication of the papers presented before the organization.

At the May 12, 1887, meeting of the Hamilton Association, the question of the revival of the association's annual field day excursion was brought forward and the membership was favourable to the idea.

The annual scientific pilgrimages of the Hamilton Association had not been undertaken for fourteen years but as the *Spectator* noted: ". . . lately the association has been prospering exceedingly and becoming strong numerically, as well as enthusiastic and progressive individually".

The executive of the association chose the third Saturday of September as the date [page 2 ends] for the field day. The location decided upon was a ravine in the Dundas Valley.

At 9 a.m., Saturday, September 17, 1887, a party of twenty-three gathered at the Hamilton Grand Trunk Railway station on Stuart Street for the journey to Dundas. Accompanying the association members were several members of the Camera Club whose purpose was to record the day's events.

Upon arrival at the Dundas G.T.R. station, the party made its way to the ravine below Tew Falls and there located a grassy knoll suitable for picnic purposes. That location was then designated as the field day's headquarters.

The members were divided into three sections, each presided over by a guide responsible for leading that section for the day. The botanical section was headed by Andrew Alexander, the geological section by J. Alston Moffat and finally, the ornithological section by Mr Thomas McIlwraith. After the three sections had been divided up, they each headed off in a different direction agreeing to reunite at headquarters at an appointed time.

The location of the field day was chosen both for its natural beauty and for its potentiality as a source of items of scientific interest of all kinds: "in fact, it seemed a huge cleft made into the surrounding plateau on purpose to afford a huge 'out of door studio' for the geologist and enable him to get near to Nature's heart, while its rugged sides covered thick with luxuriant verdure of all kinds furnished study for the botanist and harboured specimens for the entomologist and ornithologist".

The chief result of the day's explorations was the discovery, under an overhanging ledge of rock, of a rare species of fern, called the Rocky Brake (*Pellae Gracilis*) which could only be found in a few locations in Ontario. Another notable discovery was made by the geological section which found a natural spring whose waters were heavily loaded with magnesia (vulgarly called Epsom salts).

After the party reformed at headquarters, the picnic lunch was consumed, after which the party visited the falls at the head of the ravine. Returning to Hamilton that evening, the members expressed deep satisfaction with the field day and pronounced the exercise so successful that another field day for the next year was enthusiastically anticipated.

The 1888 Hamilton Association Field Day was an outing to Beamsville. Early Saturday morning June 30, 1888, a group of nearly thirty members of the Association gathered to catch the 9:25 train to Beamsville. A special car on the train had been provided for the exclusive use of the members.

At Beamsville, the members were greeted by William Gibson, John Osborne and a few other prominent residents of the village. The party was immediately driven to one of Mr Gibson's stone quarries. On the way, Mr Gibson gave a detailed description about the nature of his quarrying operation to the members.

On arriving at the quarries, Messrs Baker and Charlton began to set up their camera equipment, while the others toured the property, where over two hundred men were employed cutting stone blocks out of the escarpment for use in public [page 3 ends] buildings all over the province.

At noon hour, the members sat down to a picnic luncheon provided by the ladies, "and were again subjected to the trying glances of Messrs Charlton and Baker's cameras". After lunch, the group divided into smaller units and set off to explore the flora, fauna and geology of the area.

At 3 p.m. the group gathered together once again, and a meeting was commenced, the purpose of which was to allow the "explorers" the opportunity to share their discoveries with their fellow excursionists. Dr Burgess discussed the botany of the district followed by Mr. Turnbull on the area's geology. There was considerable interest in the "fissures in the rocks, some of them fifteen feet deep, and wide enough to walk in, while in places tunnels and caves were formed."

After the group discussion, Mr Scriven moved a vote of thanks to Mr Gibson for his hospitality. This motion was seconded by Mr Chittenden. The meeting was then concluded with a rousing rendition of "For He's a Jolly Good Fellow" in honour of Mr Gibson.

In November 1886, the interests of the Hamilton Association and the free library movement in the city became intertwined. At a meeting on November 16, 1886, a group of interested citizens gathered at City Hall to discuss the reformation of the old Mechanic's Institute.

John Morison Gibson was one of the main proponents of the free library scheme, thinking "it most unbecoming for a city of Hamilton's size and importance to go any longer without such a library and recreation room as now proposed". Mr Gibson went on to suggest that the free library not *only* have books but also "all the best periodicals of the day". He finished by suggesting that "the Hamilton Association should secure quarters in the same building".

The actual campaign to pass the free library by-law was at its height on January 14, 1889, when a meeting was called at Nelligan's wagon and carriage building shop at James and Stuart Streets.

Speaker Thomas Morris told the gathered ratepayers that he had with him pledges of support from eighteen local organizations including the Ministerial Association, the Hamilton Association, Royal Templars of Temperance, Young Liberal Club, Junior Liberal Conservative Club, Land Tax Club and thirteen labour organizations.

Adam Brown told the assembled that he recalled when there were two libraries in the city: "these libraries were productive of incalculable benefits, and included the delivery of lectures on practical subjects under the auspices of the institution". In conclusion, Mr Brown exhorted the crowd

to pass the by-law: "it was a measure - fraught with untold blessings to the rising generation and would double their -chances for success in life".

The free public library by-law was passed and the early months of 1889 were spent organizing the library board, appointing a librarian, setting up temporary quarters and beginning the process of designing and erecting a building. [page 4 ends]

At the April 26, 1889 meeting of the Public Library Board, Dr Samuel Lyle spoke in favour of allowing the Hamilton Art School to be given space in the new library building. He also proposed that both the Hamilton Association and the Wentworth Pioneer and Historical Society be given space on the second floor of the building.

At the April 29, 1889, library board meeting, Mr Andrew Alexander, secretary of the Hamilton Association, accompanied by Benjamin Charlton, made a representation in favour of allowing the association to be given room at the library: "they set forth that the Hamilton Association is a public institution existing for the purpose of encouraging science, art and literature; that it owns \$1,600 worth of property, including a museum and library valued at \$500; also a botanical cabinet in which are specimens of all the plants to be found within a radius of twenty miles of Hamilton, including ten or twelve varieties hitherto unknown. It has a government grant of four hundred dollars a year. The Association, it was said, doesn't want to pay any rent, but would be willing, in consideration of being allowed sufficient space in the new building, to place the museum and books at the disposal of the Library board".

The *Spectator*, in an editorial dated July 4, 1889, denounced the many delays in planning the new library caused by the pressures of the Art School and the Hamilton Association lobbies on the library board: "then we may be permitted to point out that the duty of the library board is to provide a building for the library, not for the art school, the Hamilton Association nor for any other body or purpose whatsoever. The school and the association named are excellent institutions, well worthy of the support of the people of Hamilton, if either or both find quarters in the library on materially advantageous terms, we shall be delighted".

On July 12, 1889, a deputation from the Hamilton Association once again met with the library board to discuss space in the new library building. Mr Alexander told the board that "the association was primarily a scientific one and would be of great benefit as a factor in the instruction of the people".

Also represented at the meeting was the Wentworth Pioneer and Historical Society, whose president George Mills stated that all his organization wanted was a "safe repository" for "the valuable papers and relics held by the society". The aims of the historical society and the library were similar, Mr Mills concluded, in the goal of both organizations was "to educate the people". Unfortunately, Mr Mills added, it would be beyond the power of the society to pay rent because their sources of revenue were too limited.

Following Mr Mills, the Hon. John M. Gibson addressed the meeting on behalf of the Hamilton Art School: "I have thought the best solution of the matter would be for the three important

associations here represented to join together as mutual tenants ... now presupposing that you intend putting a second storey upon your building, you would not have better tenants than the three societies which have been named. I don't know what the lowest amount of rent may be which you are prepared to accept, nor the largest sum which the art school directors are prepared to pay, but I can safely say that we are willing to pay the lowest rental which you will accept. If we can obtain the upper floor of the new building for about \$400 or \$500, and sublet a portion to the other two societies, it would help us very materially". [page 5 ends]

By November, 1889, the question of accommodating the Hamilton Art School and the Hamilton Association had yet to be satisfactorily resolved. John Gibson again addressed the library board and told the board that representatives of the Art School had met with representatives of the Hamilton Association, and while the Association members had grave doubts about the amount of space allotted to them, they would be willing "to put themselves under the tender mercies of the Art School, and there will be no difficulty about the relations between them and us".

Library board member George Lynch Staunton who did not attend the meeting was later interviewed by a newspaper reporter. Mr Staunton was decidedly against allowing the Art School and the Hamilton Association using the second floor of the new library building at the terms proposed: "the library board is too poor to pose as the benefactor of other public institutions. We need all the money we can get to run the library, and we would be losing money by letting the Art School share the building with us on the terms proposed".

At the height of the controversy over space in the new library, the Hamilton Association began its 1889-1890 season with a meeting held on November 14, 1889, "with a good attendance of members and their friends, a number of ladies being also interested auditors".

At the meeting Dr Burgess took the opportunity to criticize fellow association member Dr Lyle, who was a member of the public library board: "he considered that the library should be heartily ashamed of its action in the matter. It had carried on the negotiations in a purely monetary spirit. There was no regard for the society, its interests or the interests of citizens in its work". Benjamin Charlton, newly-elected president of the Association joined the argument by telling Rev. Lyle that he felt that the library board "had treated the association as if it was a poor relative seeking assistance".

Dr Lyle, in defending the actions of the library board, agreed that money was certainly what the library board was after: "it was pressed for money to carry out its allotted work, and couldn't undertake to payout what it didn't possess". At the same time, Dr Lyle acknowledged that there was a friendly feeling on the part of the majority of the board towards the association.

After the heated discussion about the new library building was over, incoming President Charlton proceeded to give his paper titled "The Benefits and Pleasures of Scientific Pursuit" in which he, somewhat long-windedly, discussed the role of the Hamilton Association: "let me say to the workers in the counting-house, office or study whose exhausted brains need healthy relaxation and change of mental food, and to the tired of muscle from the busy workshop and the unceasing noise of wheels, and you, young people of abundant leisure, surfeited maybe with works of

fiction whose appetites even for the wildest flights of fancy of a Rider Haggard have become dull, come to our meetings and I will show you delightful lanes and avenues of mental thought, down which you may pleasantly wander and lose your weariness and satiety in the pursuit of information upon interesting subjects, which become appetizing, stimulating, elevating, and refreshing as you proceed.... Let us seek to be worthy imitators of our predecessors, the Craigies, Hamiltons, Ormistons, Hurlburts, Raes or others of the long list of useful men who, all along the years of the past history of the Hamilton Association, have shed lustre on its [page 6 ends] records. What more appropriate than the words of the wise man, uttered nearly three thousand years ago, happy is the man that findeth wisdom and the man that getteth understanding".

On December 17, 1889, an agreement was reached by which the Art School was allowed to lease the upper storey of the new library building at \$400 per annum. Any modifications to the buildings' plans to accommodate the Art School were to be reversible and to be paid for by the Art School. The lease was to last five years, with the option to renew. The Art School was given the power to sublet space on the second floor, only to the Hamilton Association and the Wentworth Pioneer and Historical Society.

Soon after the Hamilton Association took over space in the new public library, it was under pressure to expand the scope of the association's work. The pressure came mainly from those interested in photography, the art and science of photography having advanced to the state that interested amateurs were capable of producing high class work.

At a meeting on April 18, 1892, the camera section of the Association was formally instituted. Shortly afterward, free public exhibitions of members' photography, both prints and lantern slides, were given under the auspices of the Association. These exhibitions attracted large, appreciative audiences which, at times, taxed the capacity of the association to handle the numbers of citizens interested in viewing the members' photography. On February 10, 1893, the *Spectator* carried an account of a typical photographic exhibition put on by the Hamilton Association: "The scenes were thrown upon a sheet of canvas by Mr William's powerful lantern, which was worked by Mr Moody. They were chiefly views of Canadian scenery, and most of them were of the neighbourhood of Hamilton, the Muskokan lakes and Georgian Bay. A few views in British Columbia, in the Yellowstone Park, and scenery along the route of the CPR were also shown. It was a highly creditable exhibit, and served as substantial proof that many of the photographers of the Hamilton Association have attained a fair degree of proficiency in the fascinating art which they practise as amateurs".

The photographic endeavours of the camera section was considered by the executive of the Hamilton Association to be integral to the organization's aim of providing free public education, because the camera was "universally admitted to be the most powerful Instructor known".

The camera section of the Hamilton Association was one of the first amateur camera clubs to devote its attention to flowers, which were "capable of serving as subjects for pictures embodying the highest types of artistic merit". The photographs of flowers were also useful and instructive to those interested in horticulture.

On February 14, 1903, Richard Butler, in his weekly *Spectator* column "Saturday Musings", turned his attention to the opportunities which Hamilton offered to its citizens "in the line of thought and reading that will fit them for the responsible duties of life". Emphasizing that with a free public library and free public lectures given by the Hamilton Association, Butler wrote that "poverty is no bar to intellectual attainments ... it is to the best interest of Hamilton and of Canada that [page 7 ends] there should be an intellectual citizenship".

Richard Butler, who referred to himself as "The Muser" in his columns, was particularly in favour of the Hamilton Public Library as a means by which the young workers of the day could educate themselves: "better by far to spend the evening in the library or at home in study than in loitering around the streets, in bar rooms, or pool rooms ... an hour spent each evening in the library digging up ideas from valuable books of reference will be worth a great deal at the end of the year to the young mechanic".

The Hamilton Association's free public lectures on astronomy were, the Muser noted, "illustrated and delivered in the simplest language so that it does not require technical knowledge of astronomy to enjoy them ... the association that manages and pays the expenses of the course certainly deserves credit for its efforts in furnishing free and delightful intellectual treats, and it is unfortunate that the lectures do not draw large audiences".

Another weekly newspaper columnist, Joseph Tinsley, who wrote for the Herald under the pseudonym Jaques, turned his attention to the Hamilton Association in his column of July 15, 1907. Jaques reminded his readers that during the years of the Hamilton Association's existence, science had come up with many astonishing advances: "and, be it remembered, that citizens – without money and without price – have the privilege of listening to lectures, and illustrations full of instruction, and at the same time entertaining, at the meetings of the association. X-rays, wireless telegraphy, the radium, photography and botany are only a few of the subjects discussed by people thoroughly conversant with them".

The Hamilton Association's space in the public library building included some provision for the display of artifacts collected by the members, including the butterfly collection of J. Alston Moffat, the stuffed bird collection of Thomas McIlwraith, and models of Japanese housing given by Mrs S.J. Myles. The major exhibit in the Association rooms was the collection of what "to the uninitiated in geology, seems a collection of stones". The curator of the Hamilton Association's museum was Colonel Charles C. Grant, who told Jaques during his tour of the exhibits that the geological exhibits of the association contained between three hundred and four hundred graptolites collected in the immediate area. The colonel pointed out that "these old stones from the mountain", were highly prized in Great Britain, Germany and the States — everywhere it seemed but Hamilton.

Colonel Grant was a dedicated collector of fossils and other geological specimens in the Hamilton area. In a paper concerning the geological evolution of Burlington Heights, Colonel Grant gave vent to his feelings of outrage against the management of the Grand Trunk Railway who had denied him access to their company's right-of-way below the heights. Colonel Grant's notoriously poor eye-sight and his tendency to become completely engrossed in his geological

research would occasionally result in near-accidents along the line. In the interests of Colonel Grant's personal safety and to minimize any potential liability on the part [page 8 ends] of the railway, the Grand Trunk Railway officials were reluctant to allow Colonel Grant free access to their property. The officials of the Toronto, Hamilton and Buffalo railway were less strict regarding Colonel Grant's access to their operations. During the summer and fall of 1895, the TH&B railway built its line through the city of Hamilton. The completion of this line involved the construction of a tunnel under Hunter Street West, between Queen and Park Streets. Colonel Grant was a familiar figure along the line of construction, especially when the company had to blast out the excavation for the tunnel through extremely hard shale located in front of the Central School.

On October 17, 1895, the Hamilton Herald ran an article under the headline "Bones of a Mammoth: An Interesting Find in the Tunnel". The discovery of these fossilized remains caused great excitement in the city and members of the Hamilton Association, including Colonel Grant were on the scene immediately and the bones were taken to the Association rooms for examination.

During the closing decades of the nineteenth century, the Hamilton Association for the Advancement of Science, Literature and Art was a major component in the educational and cultural development of the city of Hamilton. The annual publication of learned papers in the organization's *Journal and Proceedings*, the provision of facilities for the display of artifacts, and the free public lectures in the Association rooms made significant contributions to the increasing intellectual sophistication of a city that was rapidly evolving from a rather provincial commercial and trading centre to one of Canada's leading manufacturing centres, and a city whose progressive developments brought it international renown.