

# REVEREND ROBERT CAMPBELL (1835-1921)

## Presbyterian Church Moderator

Presbyterian minister, church council senior clerk and moderator, botanist, educator, and author Reverend Robert Campbell was born in 1835 on a Drummond Township pioneer farm, the son of Peter Campbell (1784-1848) and Margaret Campbell (1792-1879).

His father, Peter Campbell<sup>1</sup>, was born at Rein-a-Chullaig, a croft near Morenish, Breadalbane, Perthshire, at the southern end of Loch Tay, the son of Donald Campbell (1749-1819)<sup>2</sup> and Mary McLaren (1756-1847). The family was descended, however, from the Campbells of Lochnell, Argyll. In 1715, when many highland clans rose in support of James Edward Stewart (1688-1766), son of the deposed<sup>3</sup> King James II & VII (1633-1701), Campbell Chieftain John Campbell (1678-1743), 2nd Duke of Argyll<sup>4</sup>, pledged loyalty to King William III and Queen Mary II, and took command of the British Army sent against the Jacobites. Nevertheless, an ancestor of Peter Campbell was among about 500 clansmen who followed John Campbell (c1675-1746), 6th Laird of Glenlyon (Perthshire), into the rebel army of John Erskine (1675-1732), 23rd Earl of Mar. With defeat of the Jacobite cause<sup>5</sup> the rebel Argyll men were stripped of their crofts in Argyll and forced to seek the protection of Glenlyon's clan Chief John Campbell (1636-1717), 1st Earl of Breadalbane and Holland. Breadalbane was a slippery customer. He had managed to remain 'neutral' during the conflict, by furnishing assistance of one kind or another to both sides, and in the aftermath provided a living (farms such as Rein-a-Chullaig) for the expelled Argyll followers of Glenlyon.<sup>6</sup>

Robert Campbell's mother, Margaret Campbell (1792-1870), was born at Fortingall, Breadalbane, the daughter of Peter Campbell (1767-1861) and Jean McDiarmid (1769-1842). Her family, however, was also originally from Argyll, being from the Inverliver branch of Clan Campbell. Fortingall is a small village at the east end of Glen Lyon, near the north end of Loch Tay and about 12 miles (19 Kms) north east of Morenish. The village lies at one end of the longest enclosed glen in Scotland. Glenlyon spans 34 miles (55 kilometers) from Loch Lyon in the west to Fortingall in the east. Sir Walter Scott described the glen as the "*longest, loneliest and loveliest glen in Scotland*".

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<sup>1</sup> According to family genealogist Kathleen Hannum, a letter written by Rev. Robert Campbell stated that his father Peter Campbell was baptized Patrick McIlhwaish and that some of his family took the name McIlhwaish and some took the name Campbell.

<sup>2</sup> Donald Campbell was born in Perthshire but died in Argyll.

<sup>3</sup> James Frances Edward Stuart II & VII of Britain had been deposed in 1688 by William of Orange (1650-1720) and Queen Mary (1661-1694). Queen Mary and King James were cousins.

<sup>4</sup> John Campbell's father, Robert Campbell (1630-1696), 5th Laird of Glenlyon, commanding about 120 men from the Earl of Argyll's Regiment of Foot, was the man who massacred the Glencoe MacDonalds in 1692.

<sup>5</sup> There were also Campbells on both sides during the subsequent Jacobite rising in 1745.

<sup>6</sup> Peter Campbell's birthplace is given as Perthshire in *A Cyclopaedia of Canadian Biography*, Edited by George MacLean Rose (1888), but as Argyll in *A Dictionary of Scottish Emigrants To Canada Before Confederation, Vol-1*, By Donald White (1986).

In the spring of 1817, Peter Campbell, with his wife Margaret and infant daughter Mary, set out for Canada, taking passage aboard the ship *Prompt*. The ship had been built as a British naval vessel, but after it had sunk and been re-floated, it was put into service shipping timber from, and immigrants to, Canada.<sup>7</sup>

The Campbell family landed at Quebec City on July 8, 1817 and on July 29, 1817 they drew a location ticket at the Perth Military Settlement for 100 acres of land at Drummond Township C-7/L-6(SW).<sup>8</sup> Much of that lot was swampy ground but Peter and Margaret made a farm of it, secured their Crown Patent in 1824, and raised a family of eight sons and four daughters there: Mary (1816-1897), Donald P. (1818-1877), John Calvin (1820-1869), Jane (1822-1897), Peter (1823-1911), Duncan (1825-1863), Archibald (1827-1873), Christina (1828-1870), James (1830-1882), Margaret (1832-1911), Robert (1835-1921), Alex (1837-1918).

Peter Campbell *“had, for a time, been a teacher in Scotland, and this gave him much influence with his Highland countrymen who accompanied him to Canada in 1817 ... He brought some money with him to Canada and owned the first yoke of oxen in the settlement”*.<sup>9</sup>

Although his Argyll ancestor had been ‘out’ with Glenlyon in support of the Catholic pretender in 1715, Peter Campbell was an ardent ‘Old Kirk’ Presbyterian. At Perth, when Reverend William Bell (1780-1857) was the only Presbyterian minister in the settlement, Peter was one of the original elders at Bell’s First Presbyterian Church established in 1817.<sup>10</sup> Bell, however, adhered to the dissenting Secessionist Church of Scotland<sup>11</sup>, so, as soon as Reverend Thomas Clark Wilson (1806-1877) arrived at Perth in 1830 and founded an Established Church of Scotland congregation, Peter Campbell became an elder at Wilson’s St. Andrew’s Presbyterian Church, and remained so until his death in 1848.<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, in 1864, Peter Campbell’s son Archibald would marry Reverend Bell’s granddaughter, Maria Bell (1823-1918)<sup>13</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> Three years later the *Prompt* would be one of the five vessels that carried Lanark Society Settlers to Canada in 1820 and 1821.

<sup>8</sup> A year earlier, in the first year of the Perth Settlement, another Campbell family from Breadalbane, Perthshire, having emigrated via the ship *Lady of the Lake*, had built their shanties along Concession-7, less than a mile to the west of Peter and Margaret Campbell’s assigned lot at C-7/L-6(SW): they were - Catherine Campbell, widow of Duncan Campbell, on C-6/L-3(NE); Donald Campbell and his wife on C-6/L-3(SW); John Campbell Jr., with a young son, on C-6/L-4(NE); Peter Campbell Sr. with his wife on C-6/L-4(SW). However, any family connection there may have been between the *Prompt* Campbells and the *Lady of the Lake* Campbells, is unknown.

<sup>9</sup> *A Cyclopaedia of Canadian Biography*, Edited by George MacLean Rose (1888).

<sup>10</sup> Reverend William Bell and Peter Campbell arrived at the Perth Settlement within weeks of each other in the summer of 1817.

<sup>11</sup> Bell had been raised in the Established Church of Scotland but had joined the Secessionist Church at age 22. Then, a few months before his death in 1857, after 40 years as a Secessionist preacher, Bell led his Perth congregation back into communion with the Established Church.

<sup>12</sup> The Presbyterian Church of Scotland has a long history of factional splits. Reverend William Bell’s ‘Secession’ Church of the early 19th Century had split in 1732 from the ‘Established’ Church over interference by the civil courts (i.e., The Crown) and the landed gentry in the appointment of ministers (Church Patronage Act of 1711), a right the Secessionists insisted must be reserved for the congregation to be served.

<sup>13</sup> Daughter of William Bell Jr. (1806-1844).

In the home of church elder and former schoolteacher Peter Campbell, religious faith and education were pillars of daily life, and three of Peter Campbell's sons, John<sup>14</sup>, Alex<sup>15</sup> and Robert, all became Presbyterian ministers. A fourth son, Duncan, "*studied for the ministry of the Baptist church, but his health broke down before he was able to complete his course of preparation*".<sup>16</sup> What his Calvinist father thought of the Baptist connection goes unrecorded.<sup>17</sup>

From about 1842 Robert Campbell attended the local common school, likely 'Majury's' schoolhouse located on the south end of the Peter McGarry farm at Drummond C-6/L-10, about two miles east of the Campbell farm.<sup>18</sup> "*As it happened that school was taught by a succession of able masters, one of them being an admirable scholar in both classics and mathematics*<sup>19</sup> ... a well-educated Irish schoolmaster"<sup>20</sup>.

Robert's father died in 1848 when he was 13 years of age. Three years later he became a merchant's clerk and then, at the age of just 17 years, he became a schoolteacher. He took charge of a public school near Appleton in 1852 and the following year taught at Leckie's Corners, near Almonte. In 1853 he enrolled at Queen's University, having won the only open scholarship for the year. He graduated with a B.A. in 1856, taught school at Ancaster, Ontario, for six months until, at age 21, he was appointed headmaster of Queen's College Preparatory School, an institution preparing students for enrollment at the university. At the time, Queen's Preparatory School was one of the few quality High Schools in the country and it attracted students from as far away as Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island. One of his pupils was Hugh John Macdonald (1850-1929), son of Prime Minister John A. Macdonald (1815-1891). Campbell held his headmaster position for four years, studying theology at the same time, and received his M.A. from Queen's in 1859.



**Queen's University Student Robert Campbell  
c1856**

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<sup>14</sup> Reverend John Calvin Campbell (1822-1897) studied at Whitestown Seminary, Clinton, New York, graduated with a B.A. from Hamilton College, Utica, New York, in 1848, and completed divinity studies at Auburn Theological Seminary, Auburn, New York. He was ordained to a congregation a Spencer, near Ithaca, and served parishes at Dryden and Brownville, in upstate New York. In 1855 he moved back to Canada and accepted a charge at Markham, Ontario, in 1856. He preached in both English and Gaelic. John Campbell married Elizabeth Reed of Dryden, New York, in 1852.

<sup>15</sup> Reverend Alex Campbell (1837-1918), graduated Queen's College, Kingston, Ontario, ordained 1873, married 1865 Eleanor Woodside, minister at Beachburg, Ontario and Stonewall, Manitoba.

<sup>16</sup> *A Cyclopaedia of Canadian Biography*, Edited by George MacLean Rose (1888).

<sup>17</sup> In the 1861 census Duncan is enumerated as a member of the 'Baptist' church.

<sup>18</sup> Later McGarry's School, SS#12 Drummond.

<sup>19</sup> *A Cyclopaedia of Canadian Biography*, Edited by George MacLean Rose (1888).

<sup>20</sup> *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*. Rev. Robert Campbell's obituary published in the *Perth Courier* of March 18, 1921, states that he was "... educated in the schools of Drummond, at one time under the tutelage of the father of the Hon. Mr. McGarry, ex-treasurer of the Province of Ontario". The father of Provincial Treasurer Thomas William McGarry (1871-1935) was Thomas William McGarry Sr. (1843-1871) and thus far too young to have been Rev. Campbell's tutor. They may, however, have been schoolmates.

In 1860 Campbell left his post at Queen's Preparatory School to enter the ministry of the Presbyterian Church and was licensed to preach by the Presbytery of Bathurst (Ontario). Rather than immediately taking up a charge, however, he chose to first go abroad,

*... with a view to seeing a little of the world and becoming familiar with men and things in the older civilized communities ... He remained thirteen months in Great Britain and the Continent, taking advantage of access to the museums, art galleries, and learned societies of Edinburgh particularly, where he spent most of the winter [1860-1861], as well as giving occasional attendance at lectures in the university.*<sup>21</sup>

Campbell returned to Canada in late 1861 and in April 1862 accepted a call to the pulpit of St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church at Galt<sup>22</sup>, Ontario, where he was ordained.

In December 1863 Robert Campbell married Margaret Macdonnell (1841-1912) who had been born at Bathurst, Gloucester County, New Brunswick, eldest child and only daughter of Reverend George Macdonnell (1811-1871), the Presbyterian Minister at Fergus, Ontario. One of Margaret's brothers was also a Presbyterian Minister, Reverend Daniel James Macdonnell (1843-1896). Robert and Margaret Campbell would become the parents of 10 children, although three of their seven sons and one of their daughters died before reaching adulthood. The surviving children were Robert Jr. (1867-1892), Eleanor (1868-1892), Katherine MacDiarmid (1870-1933), George (b.1876), Norman MacLeod (1878-1968) and Donald Grant (1883-1956).



*St. Gabriel Street Presbyterian Church, Montreal, c1885*

divided and shrunken in the aftermath of yet another Presbyterian disruption in 1843. He began with less than 80 families but within a decade the congregation had grown to nearly 200 families.

At the end of 1866, Campbell left Galt to accept a call to minister at St. Gabriel Street Presbyterian Church, Montreal, the oldest Presbyterian church in Quebec and Ontario. For several years Montreal's Scots Presbyterians had worshipped in the Church of the Récollet Fathers until, in 1792, they built the first Protestant Church in Montreal, on the south-west corner of St. Gabriel and Champs-de-Mars. During its first years Anglicans also worshipped there. Campbell inherited a prestigious pulpit but also a congregation

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Cambridge, Ontario.

In 1886 the St. Gabriel Street congregation moved to another building located on St. Catherine Street, near Phillips Square, and in 1903 St. Gabriel Street Church was torn down to make way for a Court House annex. Campbell retained the St. Gabriel Street charge until he retired in 1909, the year his congregation merged with Chalmers' Presbyterian Church to become First Presbyterian Church, Montreal. Campbell was an active minister for 43 years and held the title of minister emeritus until his death.

While serving as pastor at St. Gabriel Street Presbyterian Church, Robert Campbell was also a trustee of Queen's College, Kingston, for many years, and in 1880-1882 lectured there on ecclesiastical history. In 1887, Queen's conferred on him an Honorary Doctor of Divinity.

Robert Campbell's heart was always with the 'Old Kirk' Established Church of Scotland, but he worked hard to bring about the 1875 union of the various branches of Presbyterianism. Once that had been accomplished, he joined the board of managers of the former Free Church theological school, the Presbyterian College of Montreal, serving 1875-1883. He also taught church history at the school for three terms in the early 1900s and was a senator of the college from 1883 until his death.

Campbell saw himself as an ecumenist, recognizing the 'Christian witness' of the Anglican, Baptist, Congregational, and Methodist denominations and acknowledged a place on the Christian landscape for Roman Catholics. While holding Jews responsible for the crucifixion of Christ, he recognized the *"fact that our great redeemer was a Jew, and that Christians owe the large sources of their religion to that remarkable people"*<sup>23</sup>. His ecumenism did not, however, extend to union of the Presbyterian, Methodist and Congregational Churches in Canada. Based upon doctrinal issues he strongly opposed the consolidation that created the United Church of Canada in 1925 (which one branch of Canadian Presbyterianism did not join).



**Reverend Robert Campbell**  
1835-1921

For nearly 30 years, from 1892 until his death, Campbell was Senior Clerk (Secretary) of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, the most important post in the hierarchy of the church of Canada. In 1907 he served as Moderator of the Church's General Assembly. For more than 50 years he was Chairman of the Board of Management of the Ministers' Widows' and Orphans' Fund of the Old Kirk. He was also a member of the Presbyterian Church in Canada Board of French Evangelization.

Throughout his life Campbell was active in several secular charitable organizations such as the St. Andrew's Society, assisting the Scottish poor during the hard winter months, and the Prisoners' Aid Society.

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<sup>23</sup> Quoted from the *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*.

Among a number of books, he authored *On The Union of Presbyterians in Canada* (1871), *The Pretensions Exposed* (1878), *Rise and Progress of the Presbyterian Church in Canada* (1879), *Relations of the Christian Churches to One Another* (1913), and the 800-page *History of the Scotch Presbyterian Church St. Gabriel Street, Montreal* (1887).

Beyond the pulpit and affairs of the Presbyterian Church in Canada, Reverend Robert Campbell was an avid botanist, collecting flowers both at home and abroad. He was a long-time vice-president of the Natural History Society of Montreal and its president in 1895. He contributed seventeen articles on botany to its *Canadian Record of Science*, of which he was editor for a number of years.

Campbell was a founding member of the Celtic Society of Montreal, established in 1883. A member of the Royal Montreal Golf Club he played regularly up to and including the season prior to his death. In the latter years of his life, he was considered one of the oldest living golfers in the country. He was also “a keen curler and had an extensive collection of trophies he had won with the Caledonian Club and the St. Lawrence Curling Club of which he was chaplain and one of the original founders”.<sup>24</sup>

Even after he retired at age 74 Campbell maintained a full daily schedule. In February 1921, at age 86, he was on his way to a meeting of Natural History Society when the streetcar he was riding lurched unexpectedly causing him to fall. The injuries sustained led to pneumonia and he died two weeks later on March 13, 1921.

- Ron W. Shaw (2021)

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<sup>24</sup> Perth Courier, March 18, 1921.