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Susan Sheets-Pyenson, *John William Dawson: Faith, Hope and Science*, McGill Queen's University Press, 1996, $44.95, 274 pages with index.

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SCIENCE EMERGES FROM A COLD COLONY

Susan Sheets-Pysenson
John William Dawson: Faith, Hope and Science, McGill Queen's University Press, 1996, $44.95, 274 pages with index.

The subtitle of this book is well-chosen. Here is a biography about a champion of institution-building in science who carried his faith (in the literal and figurative senses) with him in every challenge he faced. Here too is a scholar who had high hopes for moving the periphery of science to a stronger and more refined attachment to the centres of science in Europe during the mid, and late, 19th Century. Here was, as the dust jacket reference by A.B. MacKillop underscores, "the most important figure in the organizational advancement of Canadian science in the nineteenth century".

John William Dawson (1820–1899) transformed the scientific landscape in Canada, especially in Montreal where he lived, but also in other parts of the country given his predilection to wide-ranging geological research activity. His ability to raise money for this activity with his close attachments to the business elite of Montreal (Peter Redpath, J.H.R. Molson and others) was uncommon. Dawson's zeal in teaching and providing lectures to students and the Montreal society led to enormous gains for the institution with which he is most closely associated, McGill University, where he was principal for 38 years. It also served him in good stead as he parleyed his talent as a tremendously respected organizer to help establish such organizations as the Royal Society of Canada and revitalize the Natural History Society of Montreal.

International contact with the nascent professionalization of science that was taking place in the USA and Europe was also facilitated by his ability to attract to Montreal the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) and the British Association for the Advancement for Science (BAAS). The first man to be the President of both of these scientific organizations, John William Dawson was also a respected natural historian. He left his legacy not only in the institutions he built up, but with his sons, especially George Mercer, who became one of the brightest lights to lead the Geological Survey of Canada.

But, as Susan Sheets-Pyenson, the author of this sympathetic biography notes, Dawson, le père, had his share of trials and tribulations operating from an isolated colony. He failed to obtain important scientific chairs at Edinburgh (twice); he turned down

an offer to go to Princeton; his theological views got in the way of his ability to gain far-reaching scientific credit for much of his work in geology and paleontology. He faced a constant challenge in trying to mobilize international attention to the work of the growing Canadian science activity.

Dawson was nothing if not persistent. Drawing on large amounts of his correspondence and papers, Sheets-Pyénson portrays an illustrative prosopography of Sir John William Dawson. She pays close attention to his exchanges with many of his personal scientific and business contacts both at home and abroad. Her treatment of the complex but unsuccessful lobbying from his Scottish and Canadian mentors to get him a natural history chair in 1854 and then the principalship in 1868 at the University of Edinburgh is entertaining reading. The intrigue behind such academic lobbying has not changed much since the turn of the century. Rebuffed, Dawson received an offer to head McGill in 1855, a task that he took up with some considerable relish for almost 40 years.

Not a great deal of Dawson's scientific work is dealt with in this book. Even the famous episodes surrounding the "dawn animal of Canada", Eozoon Canadense, which had Dawson embroiled into no end of scientific debate with the evolutionary glants of the day, is not the focus of this biography. The squabble over the refusal in 1870 of the Royal Society of London to publish his Bakerian lecture on precarboniferous flora of Northeastern America led ultimately to his turning away from original research and devoting his missionary zeal to other pursuits in Canada.

Sheets-Pyenson hones in on Dawson's activities to grow science in Canada. Her rendering of the travails of Dawson, especially in his efforts to put Montreal on the international scientific map through steadfast efforts at having the AAAS and BAAS come to Montreal get good treatment from the author. The energy he devoted to making McGill "the Harvard of Canada" is well chronicled throughout the book. His early work in pioneering the Royal Society of Canada shows clearly why this hybrid scientific/academic institution has never really had much visibility in Canada. But Dawson was an indefatigable writer and traveller. The book covers aspects of his popular writings as well as much of his explorations in Nova Scotia (where he spent the first 35 years of his life) and his travel in Europe and the Middle East. His ability to popularize this rich collection of observations was evidently well received in Montreal society.

Dawson's reputation in the literature as one of the last hold-outs to the theory of evolution receives a different perspective from Sheets-Pyenson. Rather than highlight all of the scientific controversy that this brought about (which she does), the author also tries to balance the treatment by noting his equally strong convictions in building up an appetite for science in Canada. Sheets-Pyenson also spends some time discussing Dawson's family life, trying to portray his interests other than scholarly. The rather sad story of how his biography was compiled by one of his sons is more than offset by the scientific institutional/organizational legacy that Dawson left to Canada.

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and Economy, University of Ottawa.

ERRATUM

In #48 of Scientia Canadensis, the name of Donald Phillipson should not have appeared as Copy Editor. We apologize for having forgot to modify the template which gave the false impression that Donald was associated with the production of that issue.The Editor also takes this opportunity to thank Donald for the work he has done as Copy Editor on previous issues.