

WILKES, HENRY (1805-1886)

Homme d'affaires et ministre congrégationaliste ouvert à l'interconfessionnalité, qui a joué un rôle important dans la création en 1839 de la French Canadian Missionary Society, en français La Société missionnaire franco-canadienne, qui se voua à faire connaître l'Évangile aux Canadiens français. Curieusement, les congrégationalistes n'ont eu que des églises anglophones au Québec.

Excellente biographie dans le Dictionnaire biographique du Canada.
http://www.biographi.ca/fr/bio/wilkes_henry_11E.html

L'Aurore, le journal des franco-protestants, lui rendit hommage dans le texte reproduit ci-dessous. On y signale l'oeuvre de James Court, secrétaire de la SMFC, biographie dans le présent site et de John Dougall, important éditeur de journaux notamment du *Montreal Witness* qui accordait de l'importance aux mouvements religieux et à l'évangélisation des Canadiens français, biographie de la Dictionnaire biographique du Canada également, déjà en place dans le présent site.

Le pasteur presbytérien William Taylor travailla en collaboration avec les deux précédents à la SMFC et plus tard à l'Evangelical Alliance, tous favorables à l'interconfessionnalité.
http://www.biographi.ca/fr/bio/taylor_william_1803_1876_10F.html

La biographie par le pasteur Campbell reproduite ci-dessous lui rend aussi hommage.



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REVUE DE LA SEMAINE

MONTREAL, 25 Nov. 1886.

Montréal vient de perdre un de ses vétérans auxquels elle doit le plus. Il y a des hommes qui appartiennent au grand public; nous ne sortons pas du domaine de la vérité en di ant que le Rév. Dr Wilkes, était d'une manière toute spéciale, l'un de ces hommes. Père du congrégationalisme au Canada, dont il a été durant cinquante ans, le génie inspirateur et le directeur, le Dr Wilkes franchissait volontiers les frontières de sa dénomination pour aller fraterniser avec les frères des églises sœurs. Il semblait même qu'il n'existât pas des lignes de démarquations, aussi le voyons-nous parmi les premiers promoteurs du mouvement auquel nous devons la branche canadienne de l'Alliance Évangélique, dont il a été l'honoré président, depuis sa fondation.

Il n'est peut-être pas à Montréal, une institution, qu'elle ait pour but, le soulagement du pauvre, le soin de l'orphelin, l'éducation ou le développement du jeune homme qui ne

compte le Dr Wilkes parmi ses premiers patrons; doué d'un sens pratique, que ses premières années consacrées aux affaires, n'avaient pu que développer, il a exercé une salutaire influence sur la Société mercantile de Montréal. Il en profita pour donner en maintes occasions des conférences devant les membres de la *Mercantile et Marchant Institute*, où il développa les principes et l'esprit qui doivent diriger le commerçant dans ses affaires.

Mais pour nous et les lecteurs de l'*Aurore* en général, le Dr Wilkes a de bien plus beaux titres à notre reconnaissance. Il fait parti de ce petit groupe d'hommes de cœur qui s'oubliaient eux-mêmes, décidèrent, il y a cinquante ans, aux prix de grands sacrifices, d'offrir l'Évangile à nos compatriotes de langue française. Les vieillards d'aujourd'hui se rappellent ce qu'il fallait alors de généreux sentiments pour concevoir une telle pensée et d'héroïsme pour l'entreprendre. C'était un précieux quatuor que les Révs Drs Taylor et Wilkes et MM. Court et Dougall, tous, les uns après les autres, ont disparu de la scène. Le dernier survivant, le Dr Wilkes, est allé rejoindre ses amis et collègues, fondateurs

de la Société missionnaire franco-canadienne.

Ils ont tous laissé derrière eux bien des choses pour les rappeler aux souvenirs de leurs parents et amis. Mais leur plus beau titre de gloire — nous pouvons bien le dire puisqu'ils sont morts — c'est la conception de l'œuvre évangélique parmi nos compatriotes. C'est l'organisation de sociétés et la fondations d'établissements auxquels des milliers doivent aujourd'hui leur conversion. Et quand, les institutions auxquelles leur nom soit entièrement liés seront oubliées ou auront fait place à d'autres plus modernes, qui répondront mieux aux besoins du temps, une chose restera toujours, une chose destinée à grandir, à transformer, à élever notre pays, c'est l'Évangile qu'ils auront fait répandre, les germes d'une civilisation chrétienne, qu'ils auront fait planter, les principes d'une haute moralité qu'ils auront répandus.

Si nous devons rendre à Dieu seul la gloire pour le salut de nos âmes, il est bien permis d'embrasser dans notre reconnaissance ceux dont Dieu s'est servi pour accomplir son œuvre et nous faire profiter de ses conséquences inséparables.

...

Rev. Dr. Henry Wilkes was born in Birmingham, England, A.D., 1805. He came with his parents, whose eldest son he was, to Canada, in 1820, and entered into successful business in Montreal. In 1828, he put into existence a long-cherished resolve and entered the Glasgow University where he graduated, studying also in the Independent Theological School under Dr. Wardlaw. For three years he was pastor of Albany Street Independent Church, Edinburgh. When the Colonial Missionary Society was formed in the old Weigh-house chapel, the late Thomas Binney being one of the active promoters, Mr. Wilkes, in accordance with a previous undertaking, accepted the invitation of the Society, to proceed to Lower Canada, and on the 24th May, 1836, was solemnly designated to the work in these colonies in the above-named chapel. It was for that

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occasion Mr. Joseph Conder composed hymn 905, in the present Congregational hymn-book, "Churches of Christ, by God's right hand," etc. In the summer of 1883, he visited again the old land, at the Jubilee of the Society, and spoke of his work. He bore testimony to the graciousness of God, which had ever followed him. In the fall of the year, 1836, the church which four years previously had been formed under the pastoral care of Mr. Richard Miles and had built for the time a neat chapel in St. Maurice Street, called Mr. Wilkes to the pastorate. The site on Beaver Hall was secured in 1844, and the commodious building, which, with enlargements, and re-buildings, after being burnt, held for many years one of the most influential of the Protestant churches of Montreal, or even in the country, was, in the fall of 1846, solemnly dedicated to the service of God, the foundation having been laid the previous year. Dr. Wilkes' pulpit ministrations and platform addresses always commanded attention. His thought was clear, his language precise, and his utterance easy. Earnest, loving, evangelical and practical, he was never dull, and to the last had a wonderful stock of emotional power. For several years he was lame from acute rheumatism, which eventually stiffened his hip joints. The sight of his ascending and descending the steps of the old church in St. Gabriel Street, on the occasion of conducting one of the Centennial services on the 7th March, 1886, will never be forgotten by any who witnessed it.

The sermon which he preached on the occasion, embraced in this volume, will be read with interest as one of the last which he preached in Montreal, and preached with ringing tones, touched by the strong emotion called

forth by the interesting occasion.

There was a fitness in his taking part in the Centennial services, not only as the oldest of the Protestant clergymen of the city, who had been on terms of intimacy with
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most of the Ministers who had officiated in the old church ; but also because it was the first church which he attended for two or three years, when, as a lad, he came to reside in the city. The present writer bears grateful testimony, too, to the ready and helpful sympathy extended to him during a prolonged illness in the Autumn of 1872, by the venerable Dr. Wilkes, who supplied the St. Gabriel Street pulpit himself, or became responsible for his students doing so. The dear old Doctor passed quietly away on the morning of Wednesday, November 17th, in the eighty-second year of his age. For some time, he occupied an unique position among the churches of this country. To a large extent the pioneer of Congregationalism in the Canadas, he lived to see all his old companions gathered to their fathers, and to outlast very largely the generation which followed. No episcopal bishop ever exercised a more thorough influence over his diocese than the late Dr. Wilkes did over the Congregational Church in Canada, of which, indeed, he may be said to have been, in a great measure, the creator. In 1870, he resigned his active pastorate and was appointed Principal of the Congregational College, which position he held until his feeble health compelled him to surrender it into the hands of a younger man. Dr. Stevenson, a few years ago. Dr. Wilkes' reputation and influence extended far beyond the bounds of his own denomination. For many years he was looked up to with reverence and regard by all the Protestant clergy of Montreal, and fittingly occupied the post of president of the branch of the Evangelical Alliance in this city. The esteem in which he was held by brethren was shown by the long procession of ministers that preceded the hearse at his funeral, — such a cortege was never before seen in Montreal.

The closing words of his address before the Union in London in May last may be listened to as his parting testimony : —

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"I am now eighty-one years of age, and have been preaching the gospel for about sixty. Before that, I was engaged in Sabbath school work, throughout all of which I can bear testimony to the faithfulness of God. There are things which cannot be shaken, they are everlasting. All the powers of earth and of hell cannot shake them, and they remain. I am not going to say how many of such things there are, but one of the things that cannot be shaken is God's faithfulness to his followers. I have had trials very grievous, and sorrows very deep, but always, from beginning to end. He has been true to me, so that I would not change my past history as a minister of

Jesus Christ for all the money in the world — or all the honours meh could place on my head. I want to bear my testimony as to the graciousness of God, and I want my younger brethren to carry on the work that can occupy the mind and heart ; that it is the noblest and most glorious that God ever gave to man to prosecute. And now unto Him who is able to keep us from falling, and to present us faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, be glory, dominion and might now and for ever. Amen."