



# **In Hindsight: Half a Century of Research Discoveries in Canadian History**

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Produced by The Ontario Historical Society

## **Episode 17: Duncan Campbell Scott, Victoria College, April 1925**

On the evening of 22 April 1925 Duncan Campbell Scott greatly pleased a large appreciative Toronto audience with the first full-scale reading of his poetry. The recital was held in the chapel on the second floor of “Old Vic,” the original building of Victoria University. It was an exciting time for the Methodist college, soon to become the United Church of Canada college at the University of Toronto. In less than two months the Methodists, the Congregationalists, and two-thirds of the Presbyterians, would join together on 10 June 1925 to create the United Church of Canada. Triumphant over the doorway of “Old Vic” one can read the quotation Egerton Ryerson, Victoria’s first president, chose as his text at a Victoria College Convocation in Cobourg, the promise of Christ to His disciples, “The truth shall make you free.” Nathaniel Burwash, a future president himself, who heard Ryerson speak that day, had the words placed above the doorway of Victoria University in the University of Toronto (cited in C.B. Sissons in his “Introduction” to his edited work, *My Dearest Sophie. Letters from Egerton Ryerson to his daughter* (Toronto, 1955), page xv).

The red sandstone and grey limestone building, now known affectionately as “Old Vic,” is an impressive Romanesque Revival structure. Originally the home to all administrative offices and classes, the formal opening took place on 25 October 1892 in the chapel. Sir George Kirkpatrick, the new Lieutenant Governor, included in this speech a tribute to Victoria’s first principal: “Such a man was Egerton Ryerson (prolonged applause)—and I do not think that any body of Methodists could be assembled together on such an occasion as this without remembering with gratitude that great man and all he did for this college and this Province” (cited by C.B. Sissons, *A History of Victoria University* (Toronto, 1952), page 208).

The guest, Duncan Campbell Scott, a middle-aged Ottawa civil servant who served as Canada’s deputy superintendent general of Indian Affairs, was an accomplished writer of prose, fiction, and poetry. For decades his family had been closely associated with the Methodist church as his father was a Methodist pastor who in his early ministry served amongst the First Nations. That evening it is most unlikely many, if any, Indigenous people were present, as 1921 census documents record only 183 people with North American Indian “racial origins” in the city of half a million. By 1931 the number would only increase to 284 (Randall White, *Too Good to be True. Toronto in the 1920s* (Toronto, 1993), pages 19, 21, and 201). Scott’s good friend Pelham Edgar, the Head of the English Department (see Episode 13), chaired the gathering. During this visit, as on previous stops in the city, Scott resided with the Edgars who lived on neighbouring St. George Street. Two decades earlier Pelham, at Duncan’s request, served as the secretary of the 1906 treaty commission to secure Treaty Nine in Northern Ontario.

The “Old Vic” Building housed an important Indigenous object, one sent first to the college in Cobourg half a century earlier from a Methodist mission in Alberta. In the early 1890s it was

transferred to the new Toronto campus, where initially it was displayed, exposed on the floor amongst locked cabinets with museum material (Sissons, *Victoria*, 210). The history of this object millions of years old tells us a great deal about non-Indigenous Canadians' changing impressions of the First Nations. But let us first fully introduce the speaker of the evening and his significance to post-Confederation Canadian history, and then return to the meteorite.

Duncan Campbell Scott was born in Ottawa on 2 August 1862 in the Methodist parsonage at the corner of Metcalfe and Queen Streets in downtown Ottawa, located directly across from the Dominion Methodist Church where his father, who was born and raised in England, served as minister. Reverend William Scott began his ministry with the Ojibwe (Anishinaabeg) in southwestern Upper Canada/Canada West in the 1840s. Shortly after this, Reverend Scott left the Indian mission work, and from the 1850s to 1870s he served with non-Indigenous Methodist congregations throughout eastern Ontario and western Quebec.

Following the death of his first wife in 1859, Rev. Scott married Canadian-born Isabella Campbell MacCallum, whose Gaelic-speaking parents had immigrated to Canada from Perthshire in the Scottish Highlands. Young Duncan grew up in church manses in small towns and villages in rural Ontario and in Quebec. In high school, he wanted to become a medical doctor, but his parents lacked the financial means to pay for his studies. After he left Stanstead Wesleyan College in Quebec's Eastern Townships in 1879, he applied to the federal public service.

Thanks to his father's friendship with John A. Macdonald, the 17-year-old Methodist minister's son obtained a position as a junior copy clerk. When government offices came open, friends of the ruling party usually obtained them. The prime minister acted on a letter from Conservative MP Charles Colby, a political ally in the Eastern Townships, who had written to him, saying, "You desired

to be reminded after the Session of your intention and promise to provide a good permanent situation for Duncan Campbell Scott, son of your clerical and political friend and admirer Rev Wm Scott now of Durham Prov of Que.” In the interview that followed, the prime minister simply requested the young applicant to submit a specimen of his handwriting. It being found acceptable, the son of John A.’s friend obtained a clerk’s position. It was that simple.

Duncan Campbell Scott thrived in the Department of Indian Affairs, as it was run very much in his preferred style, a “top-down” operation, firmly under the control of the deputy superintendent or deputy minister. In the early 1880s the “inside” staff at headquarters in Ottawa, including part-time clerical workers, numbered about 40 people. They had little specific training for their jobs. Clerks copied by hand all correspondence into departmental letter books and continued doing so until the introduction of typewriters some years later. By 1890 the department’s operations across the country required the services of some 460 employees. Intelligent and capable, Scott climbed the bureaucratic ladder from junior copy clerk to bookkeeper, to chief clerk, to accountant, to treaty co-commissioner (for Treaty Nine in northern Ontario), to superintendent of education. In 1913 Scott achieved Ottawa mandarin status: he was appointed deputy minister, serving directly under Minister of the Interior William James Roche, who also acted as the superintendent general of Indian Affairs. Roche usually regarded Indian Affairs to be but a minor aspect of the portfolio, secondary to his first responsibility as minister of the interior, which left his deputy as the effective decision maker. Scott held the post of the top official in Indian Affairs for the rest of his civil service career.

Scott mechanically implemented the Indian Act which aimed at the complete social, economic, and political assimilation of the First Nations. He shared the values and attitudes of most non-Indigenous Canadians toward the First Nations. The senior

bureaucrat endorsed the Indian Department's ironclad control so contrary to what the First Nations regarded as the true spirit of the treaties. He stated in 1927, "There is no intention of changing the well-established policy of dealing with Indians and Indian affairs in this country." As his contemporaries, he did not understand that the Indigenous Peoples did not want to assimilate. They were prepared to accept certain aspects of European civilization but wanted to create their own institutions following their own social and cultural values. He did not particularly enjoy his work, confiding in a letter to Edgar on 13 December 1907 that he found his "office work very heavy and futile." (The quotation appears in Sandra Campbell, "A Fortunate Friendship: Duncan Campbell Scott and Pelham Edgar," in *The Duncan Campbell Scott Symposium*, ed. K.P. Stich (Ottawa, 1980), page 123.)

Scott had no close Indigenous friends. Diamond Jenness, the well-known Canadian anthropologist, later recalled how the new deputy superintendent general of Indian Affairs kept his distance from his "wards": "The head of the administration disliked them as a people and gave a cool reception to the delegations that visited him in Ottawa." The senior civil servant lived in a fine three-storey brick house, an easy walk to his workplace on Parliament Hill. His home became his cherished sanctuary, a world full of books and music. At 108 Lisgar Avenue he welcomed literary friends and acquaintances to talk about the cultural topics that interested him. His wide reading allowed him to make references to the great English writers of the previous centuries – Shakespeare, Donne, Keats, Milton, Wordsworth. In 1906, Duncan selected his friend Pelham as commission secretary to the Treaty Nine Treaty Party. Travelling through the rugged bush country of northern Ontario, the two friends passed many happy hours together as canoe passengers, in complete detachment, reading the *Oxford Book of English Verse*.

In Ottawa and elsewhere in the Dominion, Duncan Campbell Scott enjoyed a great reputation for his interest in the arts. Elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada in 1899, he became its president in 1921. The following year the University of Toronto awarded the accomplished poet, short story writer, and essayist, who had never attended university, an honorary doctorate.

Scott's first wife, Belle Botsford, a professional violinist from Boston, reinforced his intense cultural interests. She occupied a prominent social role in Ottawa including playing the violin at the Ottawa Women's Morning Music Club. As reviewed in Episode 14 on Annie Glen Broder, the life of women in the arts in Canada was very constraining at the turn of the century. Belle did the best she could. In personality the couple were quite different. The well-dressed Ottawa socialite contrasted so with her reserved bookish husband who wore "old-fashioned small-lensed spectacles and conservative clothes." Belle loved evening parties, Duncan did not. A horrifying family crisis occurred in 1907. In the 13th year of their marriage their only child, 11-year-old Elizabeth, died of scarlet fever while away at boarding school in France. After his daughter's death, Scott always kept several of her toys on the hearth of the music room.

What were Duncan Campbell Scott's inner thoughts about the First Nations? Some of Scott's poetry shows the influence of social Darwinism. Biological racism or social Darwinism was a pseudo-scientific way of thinking based on the application of Charles Darwin's theory of evolution in the animal kingdom to the human world. Even in academic circles, this theory dominated into the early decades of the twentieth century. The popular and purportedly scientific doctrine listed societies in a hierarchical order of "inferior" and "superior" races. Modern European nations, it was accordingly believed, were the highest and most developed human societies. Against them all other societies could be ranked. Duncan Campbell Scott's poem "Indian Place-Names," for



example (reproduced in *The Poems of Duncan Campbell Scott* (1926), page 22), begins:

The race has waned and left but tales of ghosts,  
That hover in the world like fading smoke  
About the lodges: gone are the dusky folk  
That once were cunning with the thong and snare  
And mighty with the paddle and the bow;  
They lured the silver salmon from his lair,  
They drove the buffalo in trampling hosts,  
And gambled in the teepees until dawn,  
But now their vaunted prowess is all gone.  
Gone like a moose-track in the April snow.

Scott certainly believed in the hierarchical ranking of the “civilized” over the “primitive,” yet only three times, by his biographer Stan Dragland’s count, did he use in his writing the phrase “superior race.” In his defence, Canadian literature specialist Laura Groening argues that Scott was not a racist, after all he “urged inter-racial marriage and voting rights at a period in history when the most obvious social alternative was provided by his American neighbours who relegate their African-American population to a system of racial segregation.” (Laura Groening, “Duncan Campbell Scott,” in Robert Lecker and Jack David, eds., *The Annotated Bibliography of Canada’s Major Authors*, vol. 8 (Toronto, 1994), page 476.)

The deputy superintendent of Indian Affairs wanted the First Nations to enter the dominant society, a goal fully supported by his political masters in the federal government. As Katherine Pettipas,

for example, wrote at the outset of her important study, *Severing the Ties that Bind: Government Repression of Indigenous Religious Ceremonies on the Prairies* (Winnipeg, 1994), pages 3-4: “No politician of the day could imagine the continued existence of numerous Aboriginal nations that differed significantly from their own.” In the mid- and late nineteenth, and well into the mid-twentieth century, all political parties endorsed the assimilation of the First Nations. In 1919 Scott made very clear what he saw as the millennium of those engaged in “Indian work” (Duncan Campbell Scott, “The Canadian Indian and Great World War,” in *Canada in the Great World War*, vol. 3 (Toronto, 1919), pages 325-26):

... all the quaint old customs, the weird and picturesque ceremonies, and the sun dance and the potlatch and even the musical and poetic native languages shall be as obsolete as the buffalo and the tomahawk, and the last tepee of the northern wilds [will] give place to a model farmhouse. In other words, the Indian shall become one with his neighbour in his speech, life and habits, thus conforming to that worldwide tendency towards universal standardisation which would appear to be the essential underlying purport of all modern social evolution.

Pressures for northern development increased enormously early in the new century, but first the encumbrance or legal burden of the Indian Title had to be removed. An 1894 federal law required provincial acceptance in any treaty negotiations. Three officials, two federal and one provincial, constituted the James Bay or Treaty Nine Commission to obtain an Indian treaty for northern Ontario. Due to his competence in handling money, Scott was appointed as one of the two federal commissioners. The Treaty Nine Commission made two summer expeditions across northern Ontario, the first in 1905 with the second the following year. At the numerous stops, such as that at Fort Hope in mid-July, the commissioners overlooked mentioning to the assembled Indians



the new challenges the treaty would be bringing. In the words of James Morrison, legal and historical researcher, “They do not seem to have been told that they were giving up all of their own rights to their lands, except for certain small ‘reserves’; nor that by agreeing to be good subjects of His Majesty, they were accepting governmental regulation of their traditional economy” (James Morrison, “The Poet and the Indians,” *The Beaver*, August-September 1988, page 14). The treaty commissioners gave no consideration to helping the First Nations share in the profits of the development of northern Ontario’s mineral, hydro, and timber resources. Together with the area added by the subsequent treaty adhesions in 1929-30, Treaty Nine covers approximately two-thirds of the province of Ontario.

From 1909 to 1913 Duncan Campbell Scott served as the superintendent of Indian education. He knew well the boarding schools’ extraordinary mortality rate in their early years, writing in 1914, “Fifty per cent of the children who passed through these schools did not live to benefit from the education which they had received therein.” Defenders of the system pointed out that tuberculosis was also common on the reserves themselves, not just in the schools. Dr. Peter Bryce, the medical inspector to the Department of the Interior, with added Department of Indian Affairs responsibilities, refused to accept this. Over the years to follow, Peter Bryce ceded no ground whatsoever. He held that the federal government’s record with respect to the health of the First Nations constituted “a national crime.” Dr. Bryce’s charge resonates a century later.

Duncan Campbell Scott introduced a 1920 amendment to the Indian Act which compelled parents to send their school-aged children to either a residential or day school. (See *Canada’s Residential Schools: The History, Part 1, Origins, to 1939*, pp. 278-80 and 280-8.) The Department also brought forward plans that same year to implement the forced enfranchisement of

selected status Indians. The proposed Bill 14 would allow the federal government to take away Indian status from any individual, with or without that person's consent. In historian James Cullingham's words, Scott's objective remained "the tightening the vice of Canadian Indian Policy" (*Two Dead White Men*, page 136). Additional authoritarian measures marked Duncan Campbell Scott's years as deputy superintendent general of Indian Affairs. In 1884 the Macdonald government had prohibited the potlatch or gift-giving ceremony. Yet, on account of its poor legal definition of a potlatch, the amendment was not enforced. Scott now revised and strengthened the reference, making it easier for Indian agents to send potlatchers to jail. He sought the imprisonment of participants, the confiscation of their regalia, and the complete end of the potlatches and dances. Most of the potlatch prosecutions occurred between 1919 and 1922. Participants found ways around the law, and small potlatches continued in secret. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, the ceremony went underground. Similarly, on the Plains, increased repression followed in the 1910s. In 1914 Scott secured an amendment to the Indian Act that prohibited Plains Indians from participating in dances away from their own reserves. With the cooperation of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police on both the Pacific Coast and on the Plains, the years 1921 and 1922 proved to be the peak years of prosecution (see Douglas Cole and Ira Chaikin, *An Iron Hand upon the People* (Vancouver, 1990), page 176). In 1927 the Indian Act was amended to make it illegal to solicit funds for the pursuit of claims against the government (see Episode 16: Onondayoh / Fred Loft).

As an aging civil servant Scott's desire for control extended in all directions, and his relationship with the anthropologist Diamond Jenness establishes this. On the assimilation question the two men shared the common view of their times that eventually the First Nations must be merged with the dominant society. But Jenness lacked Scott's intensity. The deputy superintendent of Indian Affairs covered over the actual conditions of the First Nations.

When Diamond Jenness prepared his monumental 400 plus-page book *The Indians of Canada* that appeared in 1932, he was not allowed to mention treaties, the Indian Act, or residential schools, as this might lead to commentary that might reflect on the policies of the Department of Indian Affairs. (See Barnett Richling, *In Twilight and in Dawn. A Biography of Diamond Jenness* (Montreal & Kingston, 2012), pages 262-263.) Scott's half-century long career with the Department of Indian Affairs finally ended with his retirement at age 70 in 1932.

### **The Backstory of the Meteorite**

The Methodist minister George McDougall so loathed “paganism” that in 1866 he approved the seizure and subsequent removal to his mission at Victoria northeast of Fort Edmonton of a First Nations sacred monument. Several hundred kilometres to the south at the Iron Creek, a tributary of the Battle River, stood the Manitou Asiniy, or Manitou Stone, a meteorite that fell from space and landed intact on Earth, billions of years ago. The Indigenous Nations recognized it as a powerful living being, included it in spiritual ceremonies, and left offerings. For many years, the site of the meteorite was a place of worship and reverence. In the mid-1860s the Methodists removed the 145-kilogram iron meteorite to the Victoria mission. In 1870, British army officer William Butler saw it there and wrote: “In the farmyard of the mission-house there lay a curious block of metal of immense weight; it was rugged, deeply indented, and polished on the outer edges of the indentations by the wear and friction of many years. Its history was a curious one. Longer than any man could say, it had lain on the summit of a hill far out in the southern prairies. It had been a medicine-stone of surpassing virtue among the Indians over a vast territory. No tribe or portion of a tribe would pass in the vicinity without paying a visit to this great medicine” (William Francis Butler, *The Great Lone Land: A Narrative of Travel and Adventure*

*in the North-West of America* (Edmonton, 1968; originally published in 1872 in London, England), page 304). Several years later the Methodists sent it to church officials in Toronto who gave it to the museum at the Methodist Victoria College in Cobourg, Ontario.

Indigenous spiritual leaders had warned that after the removal of the Manitou Asiniy, disease and starvation would follow, which they did with the introduction of smallpox and the demise of the massive Plains buffalo herds.

After the construction in the early 1890s of Victoria's campus in Toronto, the meteorite was placed in what is now known as the "Old Vic" Building, first with the museum collection on the third floor. Then some years later it was moved to the entrance of the chapel on the second floor. Apparently, it was there in the 1920s. In an article, "Chapel Hour—An Impression," published in the college paper, *Acta Victoriana*, Special Number April 1921, the meteorite stood guard, "to see that the sacred exercises are not disturbed by sounds of ribaldry and laughter." (My thanks to Jessica Todd, Victoria's Records Manager/Archivist who recently found this reference for me.) For some years to follow, the original meteorite, and later a replica, stood on a pedestal directly in front of the chapel. Dr. Kingsley Joblin, Vic '32, confirmed the location of the iron meteorite before the chapel in the late 1920s and early 1930s (interview by telephone, Toronto, 25 June 1993).

Under the terms of an agreement reached in 1935, the actual meteorite was transferred to the Royal Ontario Museum (ROM). In return, the ROM provided the cast put on display before the chapel where it remained in the 1940s, as David Knight, a Victoria undergraduate at the time, informed me in a telephone interview, 24 June 1993. The original stone remained at the ROM until 1972 when, at the request of the Alberta government, it was placed on long-term loan with the Royal Alberta Museum in Edmonton.  
Recent developments: on National Day for Truth and

Reconciliation, 30 September 2022, Alberta Premier Jason Kenney announced at the Royal Alberta Museum that through a joint stewardship agreement, the Alberta government will cede ownership of the stone to the First Nations peoples and will return it to its historic location. It also committed to building a prayer centre and an interpretative centre near Hardisty, Alberta, so visitors can learn about the stone and what it represents (Anna Junker, “Kenney commits to returning Manitou Stone to First Nations,” *Calgary Herald*, 1 October 2022, page A 3).

## Bibliography

Scott’s pride in his department’s mission led him to insist upon meticulous record keeping. The abundant documentation allows for a full in-depth probe of this consummate career bureaucrat’s relentless campaign to end the separation of First Nations from the dominant society. His prolific literary contributions complement the bureaucratic record. In the interest of full disclosure, I mention that I read in school in Oakville, Ontario, over two-thirds of a century ago, Scott’s poem, *The Forsaken*, about a First Nations woman left abandoned to die in a snowstorm by her starving companions.

In preparing this episode, four studies proved very useful. Mark Abley’s *Conversations with a Dead Man. The Legacy of Duncan Campbell Scott* (Madeira Park, B.C., 2013), and Stan Dragland’s *Floating Voice. Duncan Campbell Scott and the Literature of Treaty 9* (Toronto, 1994) probe his literary production in depth. Brian Titley, in his pioneer work *A Narrow Vision. Duncan Campbell Scott and the Administration of Indian Affairs in Canada* (Vancouver, 1986), looks almost exclusively at his career as an administrator. The most recent review is James Cullingham’s *Two Dead White Men. Duncan Campbell Scott, Jacques Soustelle and the Failure of Indigenous Policy* (Toronto, 2021). My chapter 5,

“Duncan Campbell Scott: Determined Assimilationist,” in *Seen but Not Seen. Influential Canadians and the First Nations from the 1840s to Today* (Toronto, 2021), pages 117-146, presents a more extended portrait of Scott than this episode.

A complete summary of the Iron Creek Meteorite or Manitou Stone to the 2010s is that by Howard Plotkin, “The Iron Creek Meteorite: The Curious History of the Manitou Stone and the Claim for Its Repatriation,” *Earth Sciences History*, 33/1 (2014): 120-75. I viewed the Manitou Asiniy or Manitou Stone at the Royal Alberta Museum in Edmonton on 25 April 2023. The signage is most helpful.