

Stephen Leacock:  
Internationally Renowned Humorist and Economist  
but Lesser Known Zete

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An investigation of the life of Stephen Leacock (ΘΞ '91), one of Canada's foremost humorists and economists of the 20th century. After a brief biography (part 1), this essay focuses on a review of Leacock's connections to the Zeta Psi Fraternity (part 2) and his noteworthy accomplishments & distinctions (part 3). Included is an appendix (part 4) containing some of Leacock's most significant and influential published works.

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The Torch of Zeta Psi

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Stephen P.H. Butler Leacock is without doubt Canada's most famous humorist, as well as one of its highly respected economists and educators, of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He was a prolific writer in both subject fiction and non-fiction and invited to travel around the globe for speaking engagements, usually on subjects in the field of economics, but always with the witty and satirical style that made him famous. As such, he has been identified as a member-of-note in the annals of Zeta Psi. So why is it that, outside of fraternity materials, Leacock does not mention and is not associated publicly with Zeta Psi Fraternity? At the time of this research, Zeta Psi is celebrating 135 years of operating in Canada (coincidentally, the 145<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Leacock's birth and the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his death) so this paper will explore a little more about the man AND the Canadian Zeta.

The work will present Leacock first as a person in the section called Biography. He will be presented in Section 2 as a member of Zeta Psi Fraternity. Section 3 will highlight many of the awards and distinctions received by Leacock. And Section 4 is an appendix of the works of Stephen B. Leacock.

Part 1 - BIOGRAPHY

Part 2 - MEMBER OF ZETA PSI FRATERNITY

Part 3 - AWARDS AND DISTINCTIONS

Part 4 - APPENDIX OF THE WORKS OF STEPHEN LEACOCK

## PART 1 - BIOGRAPHY

Much has been written about the life of Stephen Leacock so only a brief summary will be provided in this paper.

Stephen P. H. Butler Leacock was born in Swanmore, England, December 30, 1869, the third of eleven children. He was named after his grandfather, Stephen Leacock, who had made his fortune on his plantations and making Madeira wine. His grandfather sent Leacock's father to America to learn farming in 1876, forcing Stephen to say goodbye to England and hello to Canada. In his autobiography, *The Boy I Left Behind Me*, he described what he remembered of the trip sailing to Canada on the steamship Sarmatian: "It was all fun for us ... the wind, the waves, the magnificence of the "saloon"....", possibly foreshadowing not only his adult life but also his writing (In *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town*, one of Leacock's most famous works, the first chapter "The Hostelry of Mr. Smith" focusses on the town's saloon.)

Leacock's family landed in Montreal, which would eventually become the city of residence for much of his working life, then took a river steamer upriver to Toronto. The Leacock family settled on a 100 acre farm 30 miles outside of Newmarket, just north of Toronto, living off the land based on the mixed farming lifestyle (*The Boy I Left Behind Me*, 61).

Leacock's mother was disappointed in the local school and decided to home school Stephen and his younger siblings. Stephen's father was not cut out to be a farmer and the farm did not do well. In 1882, Stephen and his brothers were sent to Upper Canada College ("UCC") in Toronto, presumably supported by their grandfather who had already aided the floundering farm, while his father went to Manitoba to join a brother who was elected to the New Manitoba legislature. Stephen graduated from UCC, serving as head boy in his final year, in 1887.

Leacock enrolled in the Faculty of Arts at the University of Toronto, where he studied modern and classical languages as well as literature. Due to his success at UCC he received a small scholarship, which helped pay for his studies.

In *The Boy I Left Behind Me*, Leacock did not describe himself as overly studious, yet he did well enough to qualify for a university entrance scholarship while acting as head boy at UCC. This academic fortitude shone at university, where he was able to combine his first two years of study into one year. Leacock had learned that this qualified him, after three months of teachers training, to become a teacher. The farm was not doing well financially so Leacock left University of Toronto and applied for a position teaching at Strathroy College Institute in Strathroy, Ontario in 1888, where he qualified to teach Latin, Greek, French, German and English.

While a student teacher, Leacock taught a 13 year old boy named Arthur Currie, who would later become General Sir Arthur Currie - and Leacock's boss as the Principal of McGill University. When Leacock welcomed his new boss to McGill, Currie remembered Leacock as the student teacher who, when assigned to continue an English lecture that James Wetherell, the school principal, had begun, he did so "with a completeness and resemblance to Jimmy's voice and manner which of course delighted the class" (*The Boy I Left Behind Me*, 157). At the end of the lecture Principal Wetherell's only comment was "I am afraid I admire your brains more than your manners." (*The Boy I Left Behind Me*, 157), which Currie recounted, quote and all, to Leacock during their first meeting at McGill many years later.

Leacock began his first teaching job in January 1889 as a teacher of modern languages at Uxbridge High School. Three weeks into the term in the fall of 1889, he got an offer to become the assistant headmaster at UCC. He had to implore to the Uxbridge board of trustees to release him from his contract, which they reluctantly did. He taught at UCC from February 1889 until July 1899. Taking up the position at UCC allowed him to return to Toronto and to

finish his university degree through part-time studies. At UCC he received a promotion, becoming a housemaster on campus.

Upon his return to University of Toronto Leacock met members of Zeta Psi Fraternity, and joined on January 19, 1890. Leacock's writing career also began at university, with his first published works (the Famous People website) when he began writing for the campus newspaper *The Varsity*. Leacock was quickly listed as an assistant editor, while both submitting under his own name and writing a regular column under the *nom de plume* "The Sanctum Philosopher" (Curry, 52). During the 1890s, Leacock supplemented his income by submitting articles to various magazines. His first humorous article was published in the Toronto humour magazine *Grip* in 1894 (National Library of Canada). Leacock graduated from the University of Toronto in 1891.

In his autobiography, Leacock wrote that he spent ten and a half years of his life in teaching school and he explained that he "liked the last day of it as little as I liked the first." He considered that he went into teaching as "something temporary on the way to a real career" (152). He noted that he had taken up this career out of necessity, after his father disappeared and left his mother alone raising his eight younger siblings. His mother eventually sold the farm and moved to Orillia, Ontario, and Stephen would spend his summers there when not in school.

Although Leacock was teaching modern and classical languages his real interest was in the field of economics and political science (National Library of Canada). While studying Leacock read *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, by Thorstein Veblen. This work so influenced Leacock that he pursued his graduate studies under Veblen at the University of Chicago. Leacock completed his PhD in political economy in 1903. Upon becoming a doctor of philosophy Leacock said "the meaning of which degree is that the recipient of it is examined

for the last time in his life and is pronounced completely full. After this no new idea can be imparted to him.” (*The Boy I Left Behind Me*)

Professor Leacock was offered a job at McGill University and moved to Montreal in 1903. He lectured at McGill's Department of Economics and Political Science from 1903 to 1936, and served as chair of the department from 1908 (McGill website). His first book, published in 1906, was titled *Elements of Political Science*. He published many more books while at McGill. McGill had a compulsory retirement age of 65, so Leacock was forced to retire in 1936. He was designated an emeritus professor in 1936. As much as Leacock had hated teaching high school, which reminded him of “the genteel poverty of his childhood” (MacMillan, 76) he loved teaching at McGill, which, under Sir Arthur Currie, provided him the freedom to write and to lecture on tour (MacMillan, 78). In fact, he had gained such an international reputation as a writer that Charlie Chaplin asked him for a screenplay and a young F. Scott Fitzgerald wrote from Princeton to say how much Leacock had influenced him (MacMillan, 3).

Leacock's pride in McGill was such that he dedicated a complete and detailed chapter about McGill in his book *Leacock's Montreal*. Leacock credits the legacy of Percival Molson, a Zete from McGill who died in the Great War, with McGill's expansion up the side of Mount Royal: “...McGill begins all over again with the part of it best known to Montreal at large, the vast playground and amphitheater, the stadium that commemorates the name and is the legacy to his *Alma Mater*....” (291). He is referring to McGill's Percival Molson Stadium, which is now also the home stadium for the Montreal Alouettes of the Canadian Football League. At the end of the chapter Leacock apologizes for not including much about the French universities in the city, nor does he mention the other English universities in Montreal at all (305).

At the McGill Convocation ceremonies of 1953, honorary degree recipient B.K. Sandwell, a former student of Leacock's, referred to Leacock in his remarks. The event was timed to coincide with the opening of an addition to Redpath Library on campus, so Sandwell noted that Leacock was one of the few Canadian professors quoted in the 1953 edition of Bartlett's Quotations:

"If I were founding a university" wrote Stephen with a slight undertone of regret that he was not, "I would first found a smoking-room, then when I had a little more money in hand I would found a dormitory; then after that, or more probably with it, a decent reading-room and a library. After that, if I still had more money that I couldn't use, I would hire a professor and get some textbooks."

On August 7, 1900, Leacock married Beatrix Hamilton, an aspiring actress from Toronto who spent much of her summers at her family cottage in Orillia, not far from Leacock's mother. They had one son, Stephen Lushington Leacock, born August 19, 1915. In 1925 Mrs. Leacock died of cancer, so he invited his niece, Barbara Ulrichson, to come live with him in Montreal, where she acted as his personal secretary, housekeeper, and caregiver for his son (MacMillan, 134). His home was on Côtés-des-Neiges Street, a short walk to the university campus and to the Zeta Psi chapter house. Leacock would winter in Montreal, for the sake of his son's education, and summer in Orillia.

After his mother died Leacock bought 33 acres of lakefront property on Lake Couchiching, just outside of Orillia, which he called "The Old Brewery Bay". This property was on the opposite side of the lake from the farm where he had been raised. In 1928 he tore down the cottage and built a 19-room summer house, complete with a wine cellar and billiard room (National Archives of Canada). When Leacock retired from McGill he moved to this



home, which is now maintained and operated as the Stephen Leacock Museum and was declared a national monument by the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada in 1968.

In Montreal, Leacock's greatest act may not have been in teaching, but in being a founding member of the University Club of Montreal. Montreal had more than 50 sporting, dining and hunting clubs (MacKell, 1), but not a social club catering to university graduates. Leacock, along with McCrae and Alpha Psi Brother R.F. Ruttan (Ruttan came from Toronto and it is most likely that Leacock first met him there, but they were long-time colleagues at McGill) were three of founding members at the first planning meeting on March 8, 1907 (MacKell, 2). Leacock was the member who wrote to prominent university graduates in the city of Montreal to invite them to join this new club. Response to his invitation was enthusiastic because the club "would be a gathering place for graduates of all universities, offering them the amenities of fellowship in a suitable atmosphere." George H. Montgomery, a prominent lawyer in Montreal and a founding member of the club was another member of Alpha Psi. The first general meeting of the club was held Oct 25, 1907

At his death he was hailed as "The First Citizen of Canada" (Birchfield, 49). One tribute paid to him, in appropriate tongue-in-cheek manner, indicated that "He left a splendid legacy for all of us - and not all of it is a laughing matter."

Leacock was active in the Canadian political scene, affiliated with the Conservative Party of Canada. His propagandist writings and public addresses on reciprocity (an agreement between the United States and Canada, controversial at times on both sides of the border, to mutually reduce import duties and protective tariffs charged on goods exchanged between the countries from 1854 to 1948) helped bring down the Liberal government. (Historica Canada). His eloquence as a speaker was often used to introduce his old friend (MacMillan, 136) R.B. Bennett, Canada's 15<sup>th</sup> Prime Minister, at dinners in Montreal. Leacock was also known to be an anti-feminist and he did not think that women should have a vote (from his

nomination for the Canadian Hall of Fame in early 1930s in the Alpha Psi scrapbook). It is interesting to note that women in Quebec did not get a vote until the suffragettes finally won the right to vote in Quebec in 1940, after Leacock had retired and moved back to Ontario. It is open to speculation as to whether or not membership in a single-sex organization influenced this thought on gender issues.

Leacock was vociferously against prohibition and prohibitionists and would frequently write articles against prohibition - and he reportedly would not charge any newspaper for the article if they printed it (Alpha Psi scrapbook). His summer home in Orillia, "Old Brewery Bay", was also described as 'suggesting his dislike and distrust for prohibitionists and prohibition' (Canadian Hall of Fame nomination). An indication of how important alcohol consumption was to Leacock is given in his recounting of his first year as a teacher (note, he had not even joined Zeta Psi at this stage) (*The Boy I Left Behind Me*, 170):

"My salary was seven hundred dollars a year and seemed a lot of money: \$59.33 a month. In a way it was a lot of money. Board in Uxbridge in 1889 was twelve dollars a month, washing about two dollars. All the clothes I would need in a year would represent about one hundred dollars, or eight dollars a month, drinks (meaning, say, a couple of glasses of beer a day, at five cents a glass) about two dollars and a half a month, the bars being closed on Sunday. That was all the necessary expenses, and all the remaining money was extra. One hardly knew what to do with it."

Stephen Leacock died of throat cancer on March 28, 1944, in Toronto, Ontario. He is buried in St. George's the Martyr Churchyard, in Sutton, Ontario. But his legacy as an educator, an author and a humorist lives on.

## PART 2 - MEMBER OF ZETA PSI FRATERNITY

There is not much available in print that publicly links Stephen Leacock with Zeta Psi. One small mention, in the “Western Gazette” (the campus newspaper at University of Western Ontario) on November 14, 1947 talks about a professional fraternity on campus ceasing to exist as it is to be inaugurated into a “social frat” [sic]. The article lists three of the “many former illustrious members of this social fraternity”, beginning with “Stephen Leacock, the great Canadian humorist” (and followed by Col. [John] McCrae and Henry Ford II). Of the many printed books referenced in this work, the only one to mention “fraternity” or “Zeta Psi” was Curry’s *Stephen Leacock: Humorist and Humanist*. Even in the modern age of the internet very few sites use either of these words in a biography about Leacock.

As such, it prompts the question: was Stephen Leacock a proud Zete?

Although some of Zeta Psi’s public references to Leacock’s membership attribute his joining the fraternity in 1887, which is the year he first enrolled at University of Toronto, the official minute book of the Theta Xi Chapter (at the weekly meeting on January 19<sup>th</sup>, 1890) recorded: “Messrs G. S. Glasgow & S. B. Leacock were initiated into membership.” As per the custom at that time, the men were initiated and then participated in the meeting. Leacock’s name first appeared in Theta Xi’s records on November 30, 1889, when his name was presented for membership by Bros. Senklar and Edgar. Based on Leacock’s penchant for things alcoholic, it is interesting to note that as the next item on the agenda the Phi presented some liquor statistics for the chapter. On December 7<sup>th</sup>, Messrs. Leacock and Hutchins were elected (or voted in).

As a prospective member Leacock was immediately appointed to the Committee of Arrangements (November 30<sup>th</sup>, 1890). This was a committee to manage the property of the fraternity, and on the date that Leacock was initiated into the fraternity he was appointed courier to acquire a broom on behalf of the committee.

As per the traditions at the time, chapter meetings included a Literary Program, comprised of a debate (on a topic previously announced) as well as a literary reading. Leacock must have been recognized for his way with words for at his second meeting (January 26<sup>th</sup>) he was assigned the literary reading, which he delivered on February 2<sup>nd</sup>. Leacock “read a highly descriptive essay on the “Jag” and the minutes noted that the essay was requested by the Phi and was handed over to the Chapter. There is no indication on what “Jag” referred to, but this was a rare instance where it was noted that the Phi asked for the essay to be handed over to the chapter so either the writing was indicative of Leacock’s wit or the subject was private and dear to the fraternity. Although Leacock did not read often, it is noted in the minutes of both Theta Xi and Alpha Psi that his works were often selected by brothers for reading as part of these exercises.

Among some of the other tasks that Leacock undertook as an undergraduate member of the fraternity were to research and report on prices for sideboards, bookstands, etc., for the Committee of Arrangements. It was decided during the meeting to select a buffet, “upon which a pad could be kept so that brothers could record his drink”. Leacock, along with brothers Moreau and Moors, were assigned the task of arranging for a chapter photograph (no further details provided, nor explanation as to why three men were needed for the task). As an indication of his commitment to working at UCC while studying, Leacock was noted absent for many of the spring meetings, including one where he had been assigned to participate in a debate (topic: “THAT the theory of evolution is most unable on special creation”).

On October 11, 1890, Leacock was elected to the only official office that he ever held while an undergraduate fraternity member. It should come as no surprise that it was the position of Sigma. The minute books for the next semester contained a certain flair for writing that, although indicative of all members at that time, also contained an increased level of wit. As an example, on November 15<sup>th</sup>, Leacock noted that the meeting went on for a

long time due to the literary program being continued at great length, and apologized that “the minutes of the evening were but an imperfect record owing to the comatose condition of the scribe”.

On October 20<sup>th</sup>, Brother Leacock was the second (each debate team was assigned a lead member and a second member) for the affirmative side for the debate on whether women should be allowed to practice medicine in Canada. The affirmative side won, probably in part due to Leacock’s developing skills as an orator. It is ironic, however, that he had to debate on the affirmative side when later in life he would be recognized as a staunch anti-feminist. The following week Leacock stepped in for an absent brother and debated the negative side for the topic “Resolved that the political science course, as it present [sic] exists, is below the standard of Toronto University”. Brother Leacock’s team lost the debate.

In an undated meeting in December Leacock noted in the minutes that the Alpha Phi read a number of communications from other chapters in support of this chapter (Theta Xi) in the attempt to expel them from the fraternity. This entry followed an entry that the Alpha Phi had not yet investigated the constitution in regard to Bro. Young. After “considerable discussion” this was followed by a motion that the representative “be instructed to take steps in the matter ... after hearing both sides of the matter at the ensuing convention”. There were no further mentions throughout the minutes to explain this mystery.

On February 8, 1891, Leacock was appointed to the negative side for the next debate, the topic being whether or not the establishment and maintenance of a chapter club house is feasible for Theta Xi. This was an important topic since the University was debating whether or not to grant land to fraternities at around the same time. Unfortunately, the chapter debate was repeatedly deferred and the minutes show no record of it ever occurring. In *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town* Leacock outlines (15) the public animosity towards the Mariposa Hotel, because of the saloon: “Not but that there was opposition at first. The

clergy, for example, who accepted the Mariposa House and the Continental as a necessity and useful evil, looked askance as the blazing lights and the surging crowd of Mr. Smith's saloon. They preached against him." One can only wonder if this them was influenced at all by the debates he experienced regarding fraternities while at University of Toronto.

In what can possibly be interpreted as a reflection of Leacock's more humble roots he participated in a chapter discussion (February 14, 1891) concerning the distribution of the chapter's debt across brothers (the minutes often reflected discussion about the chapter debt, suggesting that the chapter was not the most fiscally prudent organization) presumably against the notion of sharing. At the end of the discussion the minutes note that Leacock was fined 25¢ for disorderly conduct (this was a large fine, since most other fines at the time were 10¢).

It is at the active chapter that Leacock met his long-time friend, John McCrae. Although they did not spend much time together as undergraduates (McCrae was proposed for membership on February 21, 1891, and in the meeting notes of March 14<sup>th</sup>, it reflected that Leacock had attended the previous evening's banquet as an Elder), they would become friends and colleagues at McGill, and collaborators for the establishment of the University Club. Curry (51) noted that Leacock had been elected by his brothers to reply to the toast to "The Queen" at that same banquet, which was noteworthy enough to be reported in the campus paper the following week.

The Story of Zeta Psi had the following description of that period: "The early "Nineties" were famous ones for the Theta Xi - remarkable both for the high standard of scholarship attained by the brothers, and for the general literary and athletic ability of the Chapter. It was fortunate that the prosperity visited the Zetes just when it did, for the year 1892 saw the advent of the Kappa Alpha and the following year Alpha Delta Phi." This

environment would have been an inspiration for Leacock, who in turn would have continued to challenge the thinking in the Chapter with his own wit.

After graduation in 1891, Leacock, like many other elders, attended chapter meetings, for there was no alumni association at the time. Minutes merely identified the brothers present as Active or Elder. In the November 19, 1892 meeting Brother Leacock moved, based on the decision not to have Elder meetings, that “the Alpha Sigma be instructed to send a general invitation to all Elder Brothers and that for special occasions at the discretion of the Phi, that special invitations be sent”. At the spring banquet (February 24, 1894) offered the following toast: “The spirit and enthusiasm exhibited by our past members shows the hold that Zeta Psi has on those who have left Varsity.”

On the topic of initiation and hazing, Leacock made some interesting declarations. As Sigma, in the November 10, 1890 minutes, Leacock noted that the “initiation of the candidate, who was injured, was spared any of the rougher proceedings and the procedure was marked by a quiet and sedate tone.” In the 1920s Leacock contributed an article in *The Varsity* (which Curry declared had been taken over by Zeta Psi (51)), about the standardization of initiation processes for freshmen on campus, called “Old Timers Deplore The Red Tape Method of Initiating the Freshmen Nowadays - Too Much Organization - Not Enough Enthusiasm”. Leacock was quoted as saying:

“I don’t like it. It is like everything else in our college life of today - mechanical organization instead of the prompting of the spirit. The old fashioned enthusiasm at a football match is replaced by organized hysteria. Convocation Day is graced by the shouts of Rah! Rah! Rah! to an agreed number of times struck out by a baton. The student can do nothing without his bandmaster, his root director, his cheer giver and his noise captain. I am told that even at a student’s funeral the sorrow is organized by a groan director.

“But I suppose it is all because I am over half a century old. Of this much I am convinced, that when I was an undergraduate the professors were wiser, the girls more beautiful, and the grass on the campus greener than ever it is to-day.”

In *The Boy I Left Behind Me*, Leacock discussed ‘fagging’ (hazing) in his description of his UCC days (113): “There was little, indeed none, of that hideous bullying which has been the curse of many English schools; nothing, that I ever saw or knew about, of that brutal beating, flogging of boys by masters just one layer short of criminal insanity. There was none of the “fagging” of little boys as servants for the seniors, in which many British people seem to exult as a rare feature of school life but which I personally have never been able to understand.” The difference in intention between this statement and the one written more than a decade earlier in *The Varsity* is simple: in the former he lamented the loss of spontaneous pranks whereas in the latter he disavowed mean-spirited or physical abuse.

Although Leacock’s activities at the Theta Xi Chapter were somewhat documented, as a young professor at McGill he managed to keep his fraternity affiliation very much low key. While the University of Toronto was debating whether or not it would be appropriate to grant land to fraternities, McGill’s approach to the secret societies was more paranoid. Montreal had just lived through the student riots prior to 1900, so there was already much tension between the city and the privileged students at McGill of English and Scottish descent (an article in the Alpha Psi archives entitled “Anti-French Campaign” noted the parading and rioting occurring in the city). At the same time, there was much negativity and anxiety on campus regarding the new secret society of “Zites”. Letters to the editor of the campus paper (founded by two Alpha Psi Zetes) complained that members of the faculty might be members of these secret societies. “We are told that representatives from the college are fraternity men....Why do they not refuse to retain in office a man who has joined a fraternity, no matter



how many prizes he has won?" For a young professor in his first years of teaching at the institution, a low profile must have seemed the prudent career choice.

Despite keeping his public profile distant from Zeta Psi, Leacock publicly associated with Zetes and supported the Alpha Psi Chapter. As early as 1904 Leacock is noted in the list of "Alumni from Other Chapters Residing in Montreal" section of the "Bulletin of the Alpha Psi Chapter of Zeta Psi".

It must be assumed that part of the reason that Leacock maintained his association with Zeta Psi in Montreal was due to his friend, John McCrae, who was undertaking medical studies and later teaching at McGill. McCrae also became supportive of the chapter at McGill, so it is logical to assume that the two would collaborate. According to the McCord Museum Leacock was in John McCrae's circle of friends and was considered a literary influencer of McCrae. Together they joined forces to help establish the University Club of Montreal (along with Alpha Psi Brothers R. F. Ruttan and George H. Montgomery).

Leacock was the pre-eminent example of a member of the club who abhorred strangers and found companionship in familiar faces and sounds (MacKell, 82). As such, even if he kept his membership low key he most likely returned to the familiar haunts of the Zete House and the brothers he befriended, and it is likely this that prompted him to donate the billiard table to the chapter. Even if the membership changed, he would have something familiar to do when visiting the chapter.

In 1924, six years after John McCrae was killed in the war, Leacock, now famous in the two widely divergent fields of humor and economics, gave insights into his own perspective on life when he wrote for the *London Times* an appreciation of "McCrae of Flanders Fields" (Bement and Bement 172):

*"Busy though he always was, McCrae seemed to find time for social life, and was in great demand at Montreal dinner parties. His fun of stories that was never exhausted made*

*him the treasure of his hostess, and even when his hostess had withdrawn, Jack's stories did not exactly come to a full stop. Yet with all his social gifts and opportunities he was a man of the greatest moderation in his eating and drinking and his amusements, abhorred late hours, and kept himself, mind and body, in the training of an athlete. I should say that the governing idea in his mind was a sense of duty; for all his merry stories he regarded the world, after the fashion of his Scotch ancestors, as a stern place, an abode of trial and preparation for something real beyond.*

*"For McCrae was deeply religious; not in the up-to-date sense of being intensely interested in explaining away all disagreeable forms of belief; but in the older sense of childlike reverence and implicit obedience of the Written Word.*

*"Of his work at McGill University there is no need to speak. The college never had a better teacher. But his mere teaching was the least part of it. It is the example of the manly life that he led, better than all teaching or preaching, that will remain with the generation of students that were trained by him.*

*"To us in Canada it is a wonderful thought that Jack McCrae's verses and Jack McCrae's memory should have now become a part of the common heritage of the English people. These are links of empire indeed."*

After World War I a stained-glass window was created and installed in the medical building at McGill, dedicated to three Zetas/medical students who died in the war: the two out panes were dedicated to Lieutenant Colonel R. P. Campbell, Alpha Psi '01, and Lieutenant Colonel H. B. Yates, Alpha Psi '93, and the centre window was dedicated to Lieutenant Colonel J. A. McCrae, Theta Xi '94, "symbolizing the friendship of the Alpha Psi and the Theta Xi and their joint sacrifice for their country, will be forever a source of reverent pride to Zeta Psi." (Bement and Bement 457) Leacock made the following tribute to McCrae at the unveiling of the window, which the Story of Zeta Psi described (457) as "the

monument to his Chapter's past and the guidepost to its future.": "The same ideal of patriotism and devotion to duty that inspired him in the war had been the mould in which his life was cast."

But Leacock's ties to Zeta Psi in Montreal extended beyond McCrae. The cornerstone of the memorial chapter house at McGill was laid on October 24, 1924, to coincide with the annual McGill-Queen's varsity football game. This was an important event in the fraternity, and the Story of Zeta Psi reported (62) that invitations were "sent to the families of all deceased brothers, to the officers of the Grand Chapter and the Trustees of the Fraternity, to the members of the Alpha Psi Chapter, to representatives from all Sister Chapters, to all members of Sister Chapters residing in Montreal and to the Principal of McGill University." As such, the Phi Alpha, Charles H. Ketcham, Alpha '96, attended. Also present, and representing McGill as its principal, was Leacock's friend and boss, General Sir Arthur Currie. There is not a complete record of attendance at this event, but due to the importance of the event it was highly probably that he was present for this event on campus.

We do know that Leacock supported the building privately. In a letter dated June 2, 1925, from V.J. Hughes, a brother from Theta Xi living in Montreal, to Walter Molson, President of Zeta Psi (McGill) Memorial Chapter House, Inc. regarding the construction of the new chapter house, it was recorded in the minutes (101) of the Elder Association meeting held on June 15, 1925:

"Dear Walter:

"In memory of dear old John McCrae and because of the many kindnesses and great hospitality we have received from Alpha Psi, Bert Little, Stephen Leacock and myself ask you to accept the Billiard Table we have placed in the new Chapter House."

The official notation of the gift was recorded as coming from “Theta Xi Elders”, thereby offering Leacock some anonymity. It should be noted that this contribution aided the chapter financially because “Billiards” appeared regularly in the quarterly Income Statements as an income stream, suggesting that the brothers had to pay to play...which they did. It is not surprising that Leacock supported this gift since he was known to frequent the University Club daily to play billiards, and his home at Old Brewery Bay was built to accommodate a billiards table. The fact that Leacock did not play well (MacKell 69) did not stop him from believing that it was a pleasurable pastime.

It was noted in chapter meetings at Alpha Psi in the early 1920s that a spelling bee had been introduced as part of their literary program component of the meeting. Leacock was a supporter of this type of literary exercise and presumably encouraged the chapter to do this. When the Montreal paper *The Montreal Daily Star* introduced a community “Old Fashioned Spelling Bee” Leacock’s letter of congratulations to the editor was published in the paper.

In 1936, when McGill introduced mandatory retirement at the age of 65, Leacock was joined by two other outgoing colleagues who were also Zeta brothers: Dr. Charles F. Martin ‘88, head of the Faculty of Medicine, and Archibald P.S. Glassco ‘81, secretary of the university and bursar.

To end the discussion on his membership in the fraternity let’s look at Leacock’s own reminiscences (*The Boy I Left Behind Me* 123) on his days at UCC to gain some possible insight into his perception of on bonds, or in the fraternity sense, brotherhood:

“It is this new integument—call it, if you like, this new fellowship—that gives the peculiar meaning to boarding-school friendship, even as the years go by and it all turns into retrospect, to broadening companionship and acquaintance. It is a commonplace, as often repeated as it is true, that the friendships made at boarding school are different in kind, deeper in meaning, than ordinary friendships. And how

they last. I am not thinking here of the school friendships of men who were at school together and, to the good luck of circumstances, spent their life side by side. I am thinking rather of those who were boys together at school and for uncounted years, for long decades, never saw one another, life passing separately for each of them, yet bring them casually together after twenty years, after forty if you like, and the passage of the years is just as nothing, the call of the past bridges it in an instant.

### PART 3 - ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND DISTINCTIONS

According to the CanadianEncyclopedia.com, Leacock was recognized as “the English-speaking world’s best-known humorist between 1915-1925”, having written almost 60 books (both fiction and non-fiction), as well as innumerable magazine articles (see detailed listing in Sources). He believed that creativity was much better than the mere citation or interpretation of facts and said in the Preface (x) to *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town*: “Personally, I would sooner have written “Alice in Wonderland” than the whole Encyclopedia Britannica.” But Leacock’s contributions to society, factual and creative, were as extensive as the tributes that society paid to him:

- In 1907-08, he made a tour of the British Empire under the auspices of the Cecil Rhodes Trustees and delivered lectures in all the great colonial cities on the organization of the empire.
- Co-founder of the University Club, 1907
- Received honorary degrees from Brown, Dartmouth and Queen’s
- A founding member of the Canadian Authors’ Association in 1921
- Leacock admired above all, and was thus inspired by, two authors: Mark Twain and Charles Dickens (Moritz 23) and wrote acclaimed biographies of both. The biography of Mark Twain was published on the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Twain’s birth and earned Leacock the Mark Twain Medal in 1935.
- He was the Honorary President of the newly established McGill Society of Ontario in 1935. When discussing the promotion of McGill to alumni and friends in Ontario, Leacock was quoted as saying “Nor do we shut people out on financial grounds; on the contrary the richer they are the better.”

- Received the Lorne Pierce Medal in 1937 (awarded every two years by the Royal Society of Canada to recognize achievement of special significance and conspicuous merit in imaginative or critical literature written in either English or French.)
- Received the Governor General's Award for non-fiction in 1937 for "My Discovery of the West")
- Past president of the Canadian Political Science Association
- Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada
- The Leacock Medal for Humour is named after him (he received the inaugural award posthumously in 1947)
- A reading room is named after him at the University Club of Montreal
- The Stephen Leacock Building (built ten years after his death for the Faculty of Arts), on the McGill campus
- Stephen Leacock Collegiate Institute (Scarborough, ONT)
- Stephen Leacock Public School (Kanata, ONT).
- The Leacock Summer Festival is an annual literary festival held in Orillia, ONT
- A mountain in the Yukon's Saint Elias range was named after him in 1970
- Two of his quotes are included *Bartlett's Familiar Quotations* , which one can only assume his life as a student and member of Zeta Psi provided some inspiration:
  - 1) "He flung himself from the room, flung himself upon his horse and rode madly off in all directions." (Nonsense Novels [1911]. Gertrude the Governess).
  - 2) The parent who could see his boy as he really is, would shake his head and say: "Willie is no good; I'll sell him." (Essays and Literary Studies [1916]. The Lot of the Schoolmaster).

- The Norman Friedman Stephen Leacock Collection at McGill University founded in 1946 from the bequest of Leacock and augmented by a gift from book collector Norman H. Friedman.

The collection comprises 265 monographs; 53 portraits and drawings; 2.1 linear metres of literary manuscripts. The collection includes first, variant and signed editions of Leacock's works; periodical articles by Leacock; books about Leacock; books owned by Leacock, photographs and portraits. The manuscripts include drafts of many of his books and articles as well as some correspondence both to and from Leacock.

- Honoured on the centennial of his birth with a Canadian 6¢ stamp
- Leacock's home, "Old Brewery Bay", was designated a National Historic Site in 1969 and now operates as the Leacock Museum
- The Leacock Luncheon continues to be an integral part of McGill University's Homecoming weekend each fall.

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## CONCLUSION

In the chapter “Some Past Phi Alphas and Others”, the *Story of Zeta Psi* highlighted the accomplishments of some of the many illustrious Zetes at the time, and recognized Leacock for his prominence as a humorist by saying “...or shall we laugh with Stephen Leacock of Theta Xi?” (654). Yes, despite the fact that he is not usually recognized as a member of the fraternity we should laugh with him, for he was a man of great intellect and great wit. Although Stephen Leacock was recognized as a humorist, essayist, historian, economist, teacher, political scientist and bon vivant, we should not doubt that Leacock, in his own private way, was also a proud member of Zeta Psi Fraternity.

## APPENDIX - THE WORKS OF STEPHEN B. LEACOCK

For a brief chronology of Stephen Leacock's writings see the list below. For a more thorough compilation of Leacock's writings see Gerhard R. Lomar's book *Stephen Leacock: A Check-List and Index of His Writings* (Ottawa: National Library of Canada 1954).

**1906**

*Elements of Political Science* (Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Company)

**1907**

*Baldwin, Lafontaine, Hinks: Responsible Government* (Toronto: Morang & Company)

**1910**

*Literary Lapses* (Montreal: Gazette Printing Company)

**1911**

*Nonsense Novels* (London: John Lane)

**1912**

*Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town* (London: John Lane, The Bodley Head)

**1913**

*Behind the Beyond, and Other Contributions to Human Knowledge* (London: John Lane)

**1914**

*Arcadian Adventures with the Idle Rich* (London: John Lane) *Adventures of the Far North: A Chronicle of the Frozen Seas* (Toronto: Glasgow, Brook & Company)

*The Dawn of Canadian History: A Chronicle of Aboriginal Canada and the Coming of the White Man* (Toronto: Glasgow, Brook & Company)

*The Mariner of St. Malo: A Chronicle of the Voyages of Jacques Cartier* (Toronto: Glasgow, Brook & Company)

**1915**

*Moonbeams from the Larger Lunacy* (New York: John Lane Company)

"Q": *A Farce in One Act* [with Basil Macdonald] (New York: S. French)

**1916**

*Further Foolishness: Sketches and Satires on the Follies of the Day* (New York: John Lane Company)

*Essays and Literary Studies* (New York: John Lane Company)

**1918**

*Frenzied Fiction* (London: John Lane, The Bodley Head)

**1919**

*The Hohenzollerns in America: with the Bolsheviks in Berlin, and Other Impossibilities* (London: John Lane, The Bodley Head)

**1920**

*Winsome Winnie, and Other New Nonsense Novels* (Toronto: S.B. Gundy)

*The Unsolved Riddle of Social Justice* (New York: John Lane Company)

**1922**

*My Discovery of England* (London: John Lane)

**1923**

*College Days* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company)

*Over the Footlights* (Toronto: S.B. Gundy)

**1924**

*The Garden of Folly* (Toronto: S.B. Gundy)

**1926**

*Winnowed Wisdom: A New Book of Humour* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company)

*Mackenzie, Baldwin, Lafontaine, Hincks* (London & Toronto: Oxford University Press)

**1928**

*Short Circuits* (Toronto: The Macmillan Company of Canada)

**1929**

*The Iron Man and the Tin Woman, with Other Such Futurities* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company)

**1930**

*Economic Prosperity in the British Empire* (Toronto: The Macmillan Company of Canada)

**1931**

*Wet Wit and Dry Humour: Distilled from the Pages of Stephen Leacock* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company)

**1932**

*The Dry Pickwick and Other Incongruities* (London: John Lane, The Bodley Head)

*Afternoons in Utopia: Tales of the New Time* (Toronto: The Macmillan Company of Canada)

*Mark Twain* (London: Peter Davies)

**1933**

*Charles Dickens: His Life and Work* (London: Peter Davies)

**1934**

*Lincoln Frees the Slaves* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons)

*The Pursuit of Knowledge: A Discussion of Freedom and Compulsion in Education* (New York: Liveright Publishing)

**1935**

*Humour: Its Theory and Technique* (London: Lane)

**1936**

*Hellements of Hickonomics in Hiccoughs of Verse Done in Our Social Planning Mill* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company)

*Funny Pieces: A Book of Random Sketches* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company)

*The Greatest Pages of American Humor* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Doran & Company)

**1937**

*Here Are My Lectures* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company)

*Humour and Humanity: An Introduction to the Study of Humour* (London: Thornton Butterworth)

*My Discovery of the West: A Discussion of the East and West in Canada* (Toronto: Thomas Allen)

**1938**

*Model Memoirs, and Other Sketches from Simple to Serious* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company)

**1939**

*Too Much College, or Education Eating Up Life* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company)

**1940**

*The British Empire: Its Structure, Its History, Its Strength* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company)

**1941**

*Canada: The Foundations of Its Future* (Montreal: Gazette Printing Company)

**1942**

*My Remarkable Uncle, and Other Sketches* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company)

*Our Heritage of Liberty: Its Origin, Its Achievement, Its Crisis: A Book for War Time* (London: John Lane)

*Montreal: Seaport and City* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Doran & Company)

**1943**

*Happy Stories, Just to Laugh At* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company)

*How to Write* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company)

**1944**

*Canada and the Sea* (Montreal: Alvah M. Beatty)

**1945**

*Last Leaves* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart)

*The Case against Social Catastrophe* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company)

**1946**

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