

# The Lampman Medallion in the Trinity College Chapel

## Introduction by Gail Lee

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On October 21, 1906 a memorial to Archibald Lampman (1861-1899) was unveiled during the annual convocation service in the Chapel at Trinity University, Toronto, where the poet was a student from 1879 to 1882. Designed and executed by Robert Tait MacKenzie (1867-1938), who is remembered today both as a sculptor and as an educator (in 1906, he was teaching at the University of Pennsylvania but prior to that he had taught at McGill University), the memorial consists of an effigy of Lampman on a bronze medallion, which is mounted on a contrasting marble slab bearing the inscriptions "Archibald Lampman, poeta natus 1861, ob. 1899" and "Archibald Lampman, Class 1882." Although only of minor artistic interest, it deserves notice as a supplement to the Memorial Edition of Lampman's *Poems* (1900), as a precursor of the Memorial Cairn that was unveiled near Lampman's birthplace in Morpeth, Ontario on September 13, 1930, and thus as a marker on the trajectory of his literary reputation that D.M.R. Bentley has plotted in his chapter on "Literary Sites and Cultural Properties" in *Mnemographia Canadensis: Essays on Memory, Community, and Environment in Canada* (1:313-28).

The Lampman Medallion is also of interest for the materials surrounding its dedication in October 1906 as recorded in the *Trinity University Year Book* for 1906-07. These consist of (1) a brief account of Lampman, the medallion, and its origins; (2) the address delivered by Pelham Edgar (1871-1948) at its dedication; and (3) a list of the "Subscribers to the Medallion." Each of these is interesting in its own way, the first as an account of the medallion's provenance, the second for the same reason as well as for its sketch of Lampman, and the third as a record of those who provided the funds for the project.

While the first and second items contain little that requires explanation (except perhaps "Episkopon" in the former),<sup>1</sup> the third warrants comment for the reason that it provides, so to say, a group portrait of some of the people who cared enough about Lampman's work and memory in the decade following his death to subscribe to a

commemorative medallion. Some of [Page 86] these were prominent figures on the national literary and cultural scene (for example, Henry Percival Biggar [1872-1938] was the chief archivist for Canada in Europe and Charles Canniff James [1863-1916] was the compiler of a *Bibliography of Canadian Poetry* [1897]).<sup>2</sup> Some were prominent members of the Toronto professional and artistic establishment (for example, James Bain [1842-1908] was the chief librarian of the Toronto Public Library and Edward Marion Chadwick [1840-1921] was a Toronto lawyer and genealogist). Several were either members of the University of Toronto or associated with it (for example, James Loudon [1841-1916] was the University's President, R.A. Reeve [18?-1913] was the Provost of Trinity College, John Joseph Mackenzie [1865-1922] was Professor of Pathology and Bacteriology, and Frank Darling [1850-1923] was the architect of several buildings at the University and College). And some, of course, are more difficult either to classify (Byron E. Walker [1848-1924] was an art connoisseur and bank president who assisted in the formation of the National Gallery and later served as Chancellor of the University of Toronto) or to identify ("Mrs. Heaven" is probably the wife of the Reverend Cecil A. Heaven of Trinity College, but "H.J. Graham, Seaforth" and several others are more elusive).

Of special interest to Lampman scholars is the presence among the "Subscribers to the Medallion" of at least four of the poet's classmates at Trinity, Robert B. Beaumont (who graduated in 1882 and fought in the Northwest Rebellion of 1885), the Reverend Charles B. Kenrick and Reverend Canon Davidson (both of whom also graduated from the College in 1882), and W. Wallace Jones (who puts in a brief appearance in a letter that Lampman wrote shortly after graduation to his friend John Ritchie warning him to "keep [his] door locked and permit not Jones to occupy the coal box" [qtd. in Connor 70]). Few Lampman scholars will not be intrigued by the presence among the medallion's subscribers of "Arthur O'Heir, Orangeville High School Board," Orangeville High School being, of course, the school at which Lampman worked briefly as an assistant master in the fall and winter of 1882.<sup>3</sup> Nor will it escape the notice of Lampman scholars that, although Wilson MacDonald's name appears among the "Subscribers to the Medallion," the names of members of the Confederation group— Bliss Carman, William Wilfred Campbell, Charles G.D. Roberts, Duncan Campbell Scott, and Frederick George Scott—are conspicuously absent.<sup>4</sup>

Accounts of the unveiling of the Lampman Medallion can be found in the October 22, 1906 issues of the Toronto *Globe* and the Toronto

The following text is reproduced from "The Past Year" section of the *Trinity University Year Book* for 1906-1907, pp. 55-57. [Page 87]

## Notes to the Introduction

1. "One of the events looked forward to eagerly in the year at Trinity was the reading, usually on some night in February, of the annual message from Father Episcopon [sic] . . . read by the Scribe or editor. Each year the Scribe, who was elected by his predecessor, would post up a notice to the effect that Father Episcopon had been heard from, and that contributions would be received from students and even professors. The material thus collected endeavored to correct any short-comings or eccentricities of the men, was humorous and satiric, and frequently very frank. Only those contributions showing personal animosity were barred. . . ." (Connor 51-52, and see Sage). [\[back\]](#)
2. These and subsequent biographical details have been gleaned and assembled from several sources, including the *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, Carl Y. Connor's *Archibald Lampman*, M. B. Aylesworth's *Alumni Souvenir: Illustrated Buildings and Faculties of the University of Toronto*, T. A. Reed's *A History of the University of Trinity College Toronto, 1852-1952*, and W. Stewart Wallace's *Macmillan Dictionary of Canadian Biography* and *A History of the University of Toronto, 1827-1927*. [\[back\]](#)
3. See Connor 56-64. [\[back\]](#)
4. It is more than possible that one or more of the poets, particularly those living in Canada and especially Duncan Campbell Scott, contributed to the fund for the memorial but preferred to remain anonymous. [\[back\]](#)

## Works Cited in the Introduction

Bentley, D.M.R. *Mnemographia Canadensis: Essays on Memory, Community, and Environment in Canada, with Particular*

*Reference to London, Ontario.* 2 vols. London: Canadian Poetry Press, 1999.

Connor, Carl Y. *Archibald Lampman: Canadian Poet of Nature.* New York and Montreal: Louis Carrier, 1929.

Sage, G.B. "Archibald Lampman as I Knew Him at Trinity University." Ed. D.M.R. Bentley. *Canadian Notes and Queries* 18 (Dec 1976): 7-8. [Page 88]

## LAMPMAN MEDALLION

Another memorial that has found a place in the College Chapel ought to have come to us years ago, for it is now some seven years since Archibald Lampman, the gentle poet and the clever scribe of Episkopon, passed from earth. On Sunday, the twenty-first of October, at the morning service, a bronze medallion containing his effigy in profile, was unveiled by Professor Pelham Edgar, of Victoria College. The effigy, which stands out the more prominently because of the cream marble slab upon which the medallion is placed, is surrounded by the following inscription: "Archibald Lampman, poeta natus 1861, ob. 1899." Beneath it, and on the marble, is the simple legend, "Archibald Lampman, Class 1882."

Professor Edgar was most appropriately invited to perform the unveiling ceremony because it was he who made it possible in the first place for Dr. Tait Mackenzie, the artist, to produce the work, and afterwards for Trinity College to obtain possession of it. He pronounced a short but eloquent eulogy which ran as follows:

"I esteem it a great honour to have the privilege of unveiling a medallion erected in the memory of Archibald Lampman. It is an idle and unnecessary thing to say, and therefore I do not propose to say it, that Lampman is our greatest Canadian poet. As each new bust or monument to a Canadian poet is unveiled, that claim is invariably made by the orator of the occasion. But Lampman's gentle spirit would have shrunk from thus being singled out for pre-eminence. He was never clamorous for public reputation. He wrote in no spirit of rivalry, but laboured ever in the service of beauty, contented only with the approval of his own severe genius and the praise of discerning minds. Spiritual truth, moral strength, natural beauty were the unfailing sources of his inspiration, and it is because he never wavered

beneath the responsibilities which these great themes imposed upon him that his fame to-day rests upon so enduring a foundation.

"This is not the time nor the place to dwell upon the many interesting aspects of Lampman's poetry. It will be sufficient to say that his love of nature was something more than a mere cult of beauty. It had in it something of the rapture of religion and of the conviction of a reasoned philosophy. He felt strongly that Nature must be our stay and refuge lest our souls wither in the counting-house or atrophy in the dissecting room and laboratory. Commercialism and materialism like two monsters batten and fatten upon our age, and a young country like our own lies almost defenceless on their path. What do we then owe to one who, like Lampman, in a material age held aloft and ever burning the torch of the spirit? [Page 89]

"I would say in conclusion one word of thanks to those who have made it possible thus to honour our poet, who was also one of Trinity's most distinguished sons.

"The story of how this beautiful medallion came to Toronto may be briefly told. Some two years ago Professor Tait McKenzie informed me that he could execute a medallion in bronze of the poet Lampman if a certain sum of money were forthcoming. I thereupon made an appeal to the public, and I am proud to say that the response was immediate and spontaneous. When the medallion eventually arrived I had no hesitation as to where to bestow it. What more fitting place for it could be found than within the halls of Trinity College, where in the year 1879 he entered as a Freshman, and where he graduated three years later? I have, therefore, much pleasure, Mr. Provost, in the names of the subscribers in presenting this medallion to Trinity College."

## SUBSCRIBERS TO THE MEDALLION

Dr. James Bain, R.B. Beaumont, M.A., H.P. Biggar, Paris, France, E.M. Chadwick, Miss Conlin, St. Mary's, Miss L. Connolly, Frank Darling, the Reverend Canon Davidson, Peterboro, Miss A. Denzil, H.A. Drummond, Mrs. Drummond, H.P. Dwight, Daughters of the Empire (Chamberlain and St. George's Chapters), Miss Edgar, H.J. Graham, Seaforth, Mrs. Heaven, C.C. James, G.W. Johnston, W. Wallace Jones, the Reverend C.B. Kenrick, Dr. James Loudon, T.G. Mason, Mrs. W. J. Mooney, Stratford, J.J. Mackenzie, Wilson P. Macdonald, Miss E. McManus, Chesley, Arthur O'Heir, Orangeville High School Board, the Reverend the Provost of Trinity College, Dr. R.A. Reeve, Mrs. B. Rutter, Dr. D. Smith, A. Stevenson, Stratford,

