

Foreword

Universities are inevitably places of intuitive topography. Students and instructors acquire, swiftly or slowly, a built-in mental map of those places where knowledge, together with those who profess it, are to be found. Offices, classrooms, laboratories are inscribed in our minds through a highly personalized order of space, time, chronology.

In the interests of public accessibility (a political gesture of no mean importance) institutions of higher education, particularly those in North America, now render their workings more visible. Buildings are clearly labelled, maps are posted at main public entrances, guided tours direct the occasional visitor to the main sites of interest.

Of course, libraries figure prominently in these maps, both private and public. Even an undergraduate of one week's standing can usually point out a building known as the Main Library. And at the risk of the now cardinal sin of elitism, it must also be said that the more modest the institution the more likely it is that the Main Library will indeed be a solitary edifice with its function displayed prominently upon its facade.

For libraries, in the plural, and in their accepted anonymity, are perhaps the surest indicators of a university's mission, of the richness and the variety of its intellectual endeavours.

This year McGill celebrates the 175th anniversary of its founding. We have campus maps and guided tours, and in a satisfying way those of us in the Humanities can point to the prominent fortress of McLennan and say, in a spirit of expediency, "There is The Library" ... However, the longer we have been at McGill the more we know that our university houses a multiplicity of collections where the specialist and the intellectually curious can find more particular resources; often in haven of quiet and speedy reference. There are, in fact, no fewer than sixteen libraries and sub-libraries at McGill. All working with that brand of discreet diligence which manages to resist, *Dieu soit loué*, the deadening impersonality of Centralization.

More particularly, and more remarkably, we have *Fontanus*, a journal of the McGill libraries, launched in 1988. Constant in editorial endeavour, comprehensive in scope. Not a mere information sheet but a remarkably elegant publication, abundantly illustrated, its every article annotated with rigorous detail. There is no publication of similar calibre to be found anywhere else in Canada. Furthermore, the energies which gave it birth have been able to launch a series of extended monographs, all based upon the resources and the personalities which go hand in hand in maintaining McGill's intellectual eminence.

This 175th anniversary edition of *Fontanus* is indeed a sure testimony to McGill's place in the international spirit of excellence which motivates the Academy, simply and at its best.

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