George Stewart, Jr., publisher, editor, and author, in a photograph published in *Canada: An Encyclopaedia of the Country*, volume 5 (Toronto, 1899).

George Stewart, Jr., a Nineteenth-Century Canadian Man of Letters

Carol Fullerton

George Stewart, Jr. (1848-1906), publisher, editor, author, and literary impresario, was a well-known figure in the nineteenth-century Canadian literary world. A handsome, gregarious man, he gave up a prosperous business in Saint John, New Brunswick, to devote himself to letters and a lifetime of communing with literary men, promoting Canadian literature, and trying to make a living by the pen. His publication of *Stewart's Literary Quarterly* in Saint John from 1867 to 1872 won him national acclaim, and from that time to the close of the century, when he was a keynote speaker at the banquet inaugurating the *Canadian Magazine*,¹ he was renowned in Canada as a man of letters.

The Royal Society of Canada paid tribute to Stewart on his death in 1906, noting his hundreds of friends and observing that 'Dr. Stewart was a born littérateur, and the enthusiasm that inspired his youthful pen lasted till he ceased to write.'² Since then, Stewart's name has been all but forgotten, although Lorne Pierce remarked on Stewart's lusty essays in a retrospective on the Royal Society in 1932³ and Wilfred Eggleston quoted his views on the impoverished state of Canadian literature in *The Frontier and Canadian Letters*, published in 1957.⁴

Recently Gwendolyn Davies has given a perceptive account of Stewart and the *Quarterly* in her dissertation, 'A Literary Study of Selected Periodicals from Maritime Canada.'⁵ George Parker has discussed Stewart's contribution to Canadian letters in *The Beginnings of the Book Trade in Canada*,⁶ and four essays by Stewart have been included in new collections of Canadian prose, one by Carl Ballstadt, the other by Douglas Daymond and Leslie Monkman.⁷

Stewart deserves critical attention, not only because he made a significant contribution to the establishment of a Canadian literature, but because, as Carl Ballstadt has pointed out, his writing contains an 'insistent note of idealism.'⁸ Stewart, half Scots and half French-Canadian, believed in a republic of letters – a fellowship among literary men and women that reaches across social barriers or national boundaries. His full-length studies of the American Transcendentalists, published in 1877,

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1869.

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STEWART'S
Quarterly Magazine,

DEVOTED TO

LIGHT AND ENTERTAINING LITERATURE.

* Article by *L. Allen Jack, Esq.*
OCTOBER.

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65 PRINCE WILLIAM STREET.

Stewart's Quarterly was inaugurated in Saint John, New Brunswick in May 1867 when Stewart was just eighteen.

were the first to appear in the Canadian press. He was one of a small group of English-Canadian critics, among them Samuel Edward Dawson and Graeme Mercer Adam,⁹ who found inspiration and example in the literature of French Canada and who considered French-Canadian literature a vital contribution to Canadian culture as a whole. These men worked to promote a greater sympathy between the French and English in Canada. In the work of writers such as these, it is possible to trace the beginnings of our unique national life.

When he was sixteen, and apprenticed to a pharmacist in Saint John, Stewart began to take up the literary interests that were to become not just an avocation but his life's work, and his sole if uncertain means of livelihood. He inaugurated a stamp collector's magazine, the *Stamp Collector's Monthly Gazette* (1865-1867), as an outlet for his stamp dealer's business. The magazine offered philately, reviews, and political comment, and ran successfully for two years, buoyed by five pages (out of twelve) of advertising, and Stewart's lively editorial persona. Stewart discussed the merits of the Northern cause in the American Civil War, warned his readers of the Fenian danger in Canada, and supported Confederation, all the while doing a brisk business in stamps. Stewart promoted stamp collecting as a means of education, and argued that even a stamp collector's magazine could foster a love of literature. The *Gazette* was gradually revised to appeal to the general reader and in its later numbers published a serial melodrama by a local lady author, offset by several anonymous satires of the melodrama. Under its commercial guise the *Gazette* was becoming a literary magazine, and it gives evidence of Stewart's early attempts to develop an audience for Canadian writing.

The success of the *Stamp Collector's Gazette* led Stewart to consider a purely literary magazine and in April 1867 he founded *Stewart's Literary Quarterly* (1867-1872) as a celebration of Confederation. The Saint John printer, George James Chubb, offered to underwrite the *Quarterly* by printing it at cost, and the magazine carried a small number of advertisements on its inside covers. Members of the Protestant, Anglo-Scottish élite in Saint John – businessmen, ministers, lawyers, and journalists – supported the *Quarterly* by contributing articles and by meeting every three months to help with the editing. But Stewart, still apprenticed to a druggist, bore most of the burden himself. When the *Quarterly* closed five years later, a local newspaper asked whether it was fair to expect one man 'to assume all the responsibility, to incur all the loss, and to do all the work.'¹⁰

The *Quarterly* relied entirely on original contributions, at first from local authors and later from writers from Newfoundland to the North West. It proffered fiction by James MacPherson LeMoine and J.G. Bourinot, poetry by Charles Sangster, Alexander McLachlan, Evan MacColl, and

James Hannay, articles on a wide variety of subjects, and literary reviews by its young editor. There was a careful balance between elements of British, American, European, and Canadian literature, a balance which helped to establish a pattern for the *Quarterly's* successor in Toronto, the *Canadian Monthly* (1872-82).

The first volumes of the *Quarterly* presented lively and realistic fiction centering on the problems of money, business, and marriage in a new society, but as the journal evolved and took on a national status, the amount of fiction decreased. The last volumes focused increasingly on politics, science, and literary criticism. And the magazine became increasingly sectarian. The platform provided for the influential group of Protestants in Saint John had been extended to men of like mind in the rest of Canada, and the philosophy of these men began to determine the course of the magazine. Stewart, as a man of broad views, had intended to avoid the discussion of anything controversial in religion, but at the magazine's close, it was rife with the Common Sense philosophy of its major prose writers William Lyall, William Elder, Moses Harvey, and Daniel Clark.¹¹ Stewart's was the lone voice of moderation, and he was often seen to counter the narrow sectarianism expressed in the magazine.

In one editorial column, Stewart described an ideal minister as one who would hold 'broad and liberal views of Christianity.'¹² He reviewed books by the Unitarian writers James Freeman Clarke and C.E. Stowe, recommending their works for study.¹³ He opposed the subtle anti-Catholicism of some of his authors by reviewing a history of Catholic institutions in Montreal, *Histoire et statistiques des institutions catholiques de Montréal*,¹⁴ and by praising Garneau's *History of Canada* as 'a work of rare ability.'¹⁵ He printed James MacPherson LeMoine's memoir of Garneau which includes a long quotation from the *History* on the importance of preserving the French-Canadian national spirit.¹⁶ While Stewart may not necessarily have endorsed this principle, he was demonstrating his willingness to consider other points of view.

Stewart welcomed Henry Miles's *A School History of Canada* in 1870, applauding the fact that Miles had tried to write a history relatively free of religious bias, and that the text had been accepted in both French and English schools in Quebec. History in Canada, Stewart wrote, has been sadly neglected.

The historian has in most cases taken gross liberties with facts, and his narrow prejudices and often-times an over-religious zeal, have all interfered in the production of a fair and equitable history.¹⁷

If Stewart was not refuting directly the narrow religious views of others

writing in the *Quarterly*, he was at least putting the stamp of his own opinion on his journal.

Stewart's tolerant viewpoint was at odds with the parochialism of most of the *Quarterly*'s staff, and the dissolution of the *Quarterly* was probably inevitable when Stewart, contributing vast quantities of time and energy to the magazine, found its philosophy beyond his ability to control.

The *Quarterly* had been well reviewed in every part of the country, and its demise in January 1872 was met with regret both in Canada and the United States. A banquet honouring Stewart and the *Quarterly* was held in Saint John the next June, and of the many newspapers reporting the proceedings, the *New York Tribune* offered the most trenchant comment. The *Tribune*, calling Stewart's efforts to carry on the *Quarterly* a 'plucky struggle with fate,' observed that though the magazine was admired and praised,

the approval of its friends did not take that numismatic form which conduces to the longevity of literary enterprises. Mr. Stewart, concluding he had burned enough incense to an ungrateful muse, went into business. The magazine went into liquidation, and as usual in such cases, the Province went into mourning. The stricken citizens have just given Mr. Stewart a superb banquet in which the most prominent people have indulged in flattering regrets of such warmth and earnestness that it seems incredible that the *Quarterly* should have died.¹⁸

Stewart had opened a pharmacy early in 1871, and he now proceeded to concentrate on his business. During the years that followed, Stewart put his knowledge of literature to a practical use by publishing a series of shameless verse-parodies in local newspapers to advertise the drug store,¹⁹ and built up a prosperous trade. He continued to work as a part-time journalist. He was city editor for the *Saint John Daily News* from 1871 to 1875 and literary and drama reviewer for the *Watchman* in Saint John from 1875 to 1877. In April 1875 Stewart married Maggie Jewett, the adopted daughter of E.D. Jewett, a well-to-do Saint John lumberman and shipbuilder.

In 1876 Stewart began to publish a group of articles on Carlyle and notable American writers in *Belford's Monthly Magazine* in Toronto. During the years he was producing the *Quarterly*, Stewart had made several trips to Boston and Concord to pay court to the New England writers, among them Longfellow, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Whittier, Emerson, James Lowell, and William Cullen Bryant. He had continued to correspond with them and to visit them on occasion so that his essays had a fresh appeal. They are the essays of a literary enthusiast, appreciative rather than evaluative, and directed at the amateur student of contemporary literature.

The articles were published in book form by Belford Brothers as *Evenings in the Library* in 1877.

A fire in Saint John in the summer of 1877 destroyed almost a third of the city, including Stewart's house and pharmacy, and Stewart, turning adversity to advantage, published a contemporary history of the fire – an instant book assembled with remarkable speed. Stewart and the Belford brothers issued *The Story of the Great Fire in St. John, N.B., June 20, 1877* within five weeks of the fire, and by taking advantage of the widespread publicity given the fire in Canada and the United States, sold 10,000 copies.²⁰

The Story of the Great Fire is a literary curiosity, a combination of personal memoir, historical detail, and lists of homes and businesses burned, ships destroyed, and money and supplies donated to the city. The book is still a reliable source of information, and was reprinted in facsimile form by Non-Entity Press of St. Stephen, New Brunswick in 1980. In the summer of 1985, a play based on the book and written by Sue Bate and Costas Halavrezas was produced in Saint John as a Bicentennial project.

Stewart earned a percentage on the sale of *The Great Fire*, and when in the fall of 1877 Belfords offered him a position with their firm in Toronto, he saw an opportunity to make a living in literature. On 7 September 1877 the *Saint John Daily News* reported that Stewart, like Keats, had renounced pharmacy for literary pursuits, and the following spring Stewart and his family moved to Toronto. There he became editor of *Rose-Belford's Canadian Monthly and National Review*. This magazine was formed by the amalgamation of *Belford's Magazine* (1875-1877) with the *Canadian Monthly and National Review* (1872-1878) when Belford Brothers Publishing merged with Hunter, Rose and Company, the publishers of the *Canadian Monthly*, to become the Rose-Belford Publishing Company. Stewart, as editor of *Rose-Belford's*, added American writers to the fiction department, as well as more authors from the Maritimes, and wrote ten book reviews a month for the magazine. Because Stewart had also begun to collect material for his book on Dufferin, it was fortunate for him, in the press of work, that the brief style of the *Atlantic* review was then in vogue.

In the fall of 1878, the Belfords, now Rose-Belford Publishing Company, brought out Stewart's book *Canada under the Administration of the Earl of Dufferin*, a group of Dufferin's speeches interspersed with political commentary by Stewart. Stewart apparently made no specific arrangements with the publishers for remuneration, and when they refused him royalties on the grounds that 'the work had been done in his capacity as editor of the magazine,'²¹ he resigned. He sued Rose-Belford Publishing Company in May 1879 but lost his case. The magazine *Grip* commented that the verdict might have been good law, but it was 'poor consolation to Mr. Stewart after all his hard work.'²²

Stewart, with a growing family to support, moved to Quebec City to become editor-in-chief of the *Quebec Morning Chronicle*. He never again attempted a major work, although the *Chronicle* press published his essays and lectures in pamphlet form. Stewart did write to Charles Lindsey in Toronto, in June 1879, asking his support for a history of the rebellion of 1837.²³ He planned to call the book *The Revolt of the Canadas*. In asking for 'support,' Stewart was actually requesting access to the papers of William Lyon Mackenzie, in the possession of the Lindsey family. Lindsey had testified for Stewart in the trial against Rose-Belford so Stewart had some reason to expect his co-operation, but Lindsey replied that he himself was planning a history of the rebellion.²⁴ Lindsey retained his proprietary interest in the papers, and Stewart, indebted to Lindsey, abandoned the project.

Stewart collaborated with John Charles Dent in *The Canadian Portrait Gallery*, published in 1880-81.²⁵ During their association Stewart may have given Dent the material he had collected on the rebellion, for in 1885 Dent dedicated his history of the rebellion *The Story of the Upper Canadian Rebellion* to Stewart. The dedication reads:

To my esteemed friend, George Stewart, Jun'r, of Quebec, whose researches in a kindred direction will enable him to do full justice to whatever is meretorious in it, while his generous appreciation of his literary brethren will render him indulgent of its defects.²⁶

The Story of the Upper Canadian Rebellion was critical of the Family Compact and of the actions of William Lyon Mackenzie, and it caused a furor when it was published. No review of the book by Stewart survives, and one wonders how far Stewart may have endorsed its ideas considering the dedication to him, and whether the reaction to the book caused him embarrassment. By 1885, however, Stewart had a secure position in the Canadian literary establishment.

In Quebec City Stewart found kindred spirits among cosmopolitan writers bound by a common interest in the world of letters. He contributed two English articles to a collection of French essays printed privately by the Spanish consul in Quebec, a collection whose epigraph reads, 'L'empire des hommes de lettres s'étend par tout le globe. L'empire des grands de la terre ne s'y étend pas.'²⁷

Stewart's aspirations as a man of letters were formally acknowledged when he was made a founding member of the Royal Society in 1882, and he worked as the elected but unpaid secretary of the English literature section of the Society for nearly twenty years. As secretary, Stewart was in touch with almost all the Canadian writers of his time, both French and English. He continued to write and to lecture, while working full-time for the

19. Warwick Crescent.

W.

Oct. 16. '84.

Dear Sir,
I beg first of all to apologize
for the delay in replying to your letter
which found me in the midst of certain
small but effectual hindrances to giving
it an immediate answer - caused, as
these were, by a return from abroad.

If you can conveniently call at the
Athenaeum Club on Saturday at 3. p.m.
I shall be happy to meet you there, and
save you the trouble of a journey to this
out-of-the-way part of Town.

Believe me, Dear Sir,

Yours very sincerely
Robert Browning.

Robert Browning wrote to Stewart on 16 Oct. 1884 arranging to meet him at the Athenaeum Club in London.

Chronicle. He added lustre to his reputation as a man of letters by the publication of five articles on the Maritimes and Quebec in the ninth edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1884-1886).

In the fall of 1884, Stewart and his wife made a six-week literary pilgrimage to the British Isles. Sponsored to the Athenaeum Club by Matthew Arnold (who had been his guest while lecturing in Canada the previous winter), and armed with letters of introduction, Stewart met most of the important literary men of the day. A collection of letters written to Stewart tells the story of this trip.²⁸

Stewart's Canadian and American literary friends were conscripted to supply him with introductions. Goldwin Smith wrote to introduce Stewart to Benjamin Jowett and Mark Pattison at Oxford, and John Greenleaf Whittier sent a letter for John Bright.²⁹ George Dennison wrote from Toronto to say that he had written General Wolseley on Stewart's behalf. There was speculation that Wolseley would be sent to relieve General Gordon at Khartoum, and Dennison added teasingly, 'I am afraid [Wolseley] would have got off to Egypt before my letter gets there, but if he gets my letter he will be worrying all the way down the Nile on account of missing you.'³⁰ The Earl of Dufferin wrote from Constantinople with letters for the Earl of Lytton (the son of Bulwer-Lytton), Robert Browning, and Lord Houghton (Richard Monckton Milnes).³¹ William Dean Howells sent a letter for Henry James.³² A letter from the Marquess of Lorne, apologizing for missing him in Glasgow and enclosing an introduction to Tennyson, reached Stewart in London.³³

The Stewarts were given a cordial reception in England and were able to view all the literary lions to whom they had introductions except for Henry James, Mark Pattison, who died before the Stewarts reached England, and General Wolseley, who was on his way to the Sudan. The Stewarts spent a day with the Lyttons at Knebworth and visited the Tennysons at Haslemere, a visit Stewart described in an essay the year of Tennyson's death in 1892. The Stewarts were invited to Matthew Arnold's cottage in Surrey,³⁴ and had tea with Wilkie Collins, whose work Stewart had published while editor of *Rose-Belford's Canadian Magazine*. Browning arranged to meet Stewart at the Athenaeum Club to save him a journey to an 'out-of-the-way part of town.'³⁵

On the way home, Stewart and his wife dined in Dublin with Earl Spencer, Viceroy of Ireland, and were welcomed back to Canada by a letter from the Marquess of Lansdowne, the Canadian Governor General, who reported that Spencer had been much pleased with the Stewarts' visit.³⁶ The trip added to Stewart's store of literary anecdote, the stock-in-trade of the literary man, and to his name at home as a man of letters.

George Stewart's reputation as a man of letters grew steadily in the

The library of the Literary and Historical Society of Quebec where Stewart gave many of his lectures.

1880s. He continued to chart the course of Canadian letters and to promote its French and English authors, writing major articles on Louis Fréchette, Charles G.D. Roberts, and Bliss Carman. He served as president of the Literary and Historical Society of Quebec for seven years from 1885 to 1891. In 1885 he took a major and perhaps unprecedented step in promoting a literature for Canada. He wrote a private letter to George Grant, the principal of Queen's University, asking for an honorary degree on the grounds of his services to literature in Canada. Stewart gave a list of his publications and his editorial work and added, 'I hope, dear Dr. Grant, that you will pardon this apparent display of egotism.'³⁷

If the letter appears to be prompted by Stewart's pride in his work, it was prompted equally by a desire to recruit the universities to the cause of Canadian literature. There is no record of Grant's reply, but Queen's did not act on Stewart's request. The following year, however, he was granted a D.C.L., *honoris causa*, by King's College, Windsor. Stewart was the first English-Canadian littérateur to be given an honorary degree on the basis of his work for letters in Canada, and the *Montreal Gazette* observed:

Until King's College gave Mr. Stewart the stamp of its approbation, literature had remained without the pale of academic favour.... No man in Canada has served the cause of our young literature more faithfully than he.³⁸

The degree from King's College was followed by a Litt.D., *honoris causa*, from Laval in 1888. The *Montreal Gazette* looked upon this degree as 'an omen of the union and co-operation of both sections of our people, for the best interests of the common country.'³⁹ Bishop's College gave Stewart a D.C.L., *ad eundem*, in 1888, and McGill gave him an LL.D in 1889, as one of Canada's best known literary men. Sir William Dawson, in conferring the degree, cited Stewart's many publications and acknowledged Stewart's claim 'to the gratitude and esteem of his countrymen, and especially of those who value our national literature.'⁴⁰

Stewart remained as editor-in-chief of the *Chronicle* until 1896, when the ownership of the newspaper changed hands and he lost his job. In 1898 he bought the *Quebec Daily Mercury*, perhaps using an inheritance his wife received that year, and devoted his energies to the paper, giving up his lecturing and publishing few articles in outside journals. The *Mercury*, founded in 1805, was a traditional four-page daily in the style of the newspapers of Stewart's youth in Saint John. Stewart announced, when he became owner, that the newspaper would be strictly independent, and he maintained his position as an independent, although his respect for Laurier and his sale of the paper to a Liberal firm might have made the reader suspect the paper of Liberal sympathies. Indeed, although Stewart professed to

be an independent in politics, he wrote a succession of confidential letters to Laurier between 1896 and 1901 asking first for support for an English Liberal newspaper in Quebec City⁴¹ and then for support for the *Mercury*.⁴² Laurier arranged some government advertising for Stewart's paper, but the printing contracts went to long-standing Liberal supporters.⁴³ Laurier's letter to Stewart in January 1902 suggested that Stewart 'capture' the *Quebec Morning Chronicle* and unite the *Mercury* with it but did not offer more lucrative work for the newspaper.⁴⁴

The *Mercury* combined local and world news with extensive reports on science and the arts and offered its readers a detailed view of the late nineteenth-century world. The paper remained a one-man operation, however, and with an old-fashioned press and little political patronage, it could not compete with the better-founded English dailies in the city. By 1902 the *Mercury* had had its day, and its sale to the Tarte Brothers firm of Montreal, proprietors of the Liberal *La Patrie*, postponed but did not prevent its eventual demise. Stewart remained as editor of the *Mercury* until its dissolution in 1903 when he returned to the *Chronicle* as night editor. He worked with that paper until his death in 1906.

Stewart's family was left with little money when he died. His autograph letters, his stamp collection, and his collection of 5,000 books, many of them first editions, were sold to pay creditors.

The life of the literary man remained one of struggle for years after Stewart's death. In 1956, when the author and publisher John Sutherland died, Louis Dudek, remarking on Sutherland's dedication to writing in Canada, observed, 'Most strange of all, in this land, he was a Man of Letters, living by and for good literature, in a time when literature no longer has exchange value.'⁴⁵ Sutherland's career had in it echoes of Stewart's experience, many decades earlier, when Stewart's dream of supporting himself as a man of letters, of living by and for good literature, foundered in a society more interested in commercial enterprise than in cultural development.

NOTES

For the location of all archival material cited in these notes see the following bibliography.

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- 8 Carl Ballstadt, Introduction, *The Search for English-Canadian Literature: An Anthology of Critical Articles from the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1975), p. xxxix.
- 9 Ballstadt, pp. xxxvii-xxxix.
- 10 George Stewart Scrapbook 9.
- 11 See A.B. McKillop's *A Disciplined Intelligence: Critical Inquiry and Canadian Thought in the Victorian Era* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1979) for an appraisal of the role played by Common Sense philosophy in the intellectual life of nineteenth-century Canada.
- 12 *Stewart's Quarterly* 5(1871): 207.
- 13 *Stewart's Quarterly* 5(1871): 214-21; *Stewart's Quarterly* 2(1868): 126.
- 14 *Stewart's Quarterly* 4(1870): 108.
- 15 *Stewart's Quarterly* 3(1870): 406.
- 16 *Stewart's Quarterly* 2(1868): 137-40.
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- 18 *New York Tribune* 19 June 1872.
- 19 For example, to promote Simpson's Cattle Spice, a 'Hog Fattening, Cattle Expanding, and Poultry Pacifying Compound,' Stewart, misquoting James Hogg, threatened to advertise

Until not one thin sheep remains
 To graze on stern New Brunswick's plains.

Saint John Daily News 26 Apr. 1872.
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- 21 *Grip* 17 May 1879.
- 22 *Grip* 17 May 1879.
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- 45 Louis Dudek, review of *The Poetry of E.J. Pratt: A New Interpretation*, by John Sutherland, in *The Canadian Forum*, Nov. 1956, p. 186.

Illustrations of Stewart's Literary Quarterly Magazine and the Browning letter courtesy of the Metropolitan Toronto Reference Library; the photograph of the library of the Literary and Historical Society of Quebec, courtesy of Robert Dooley.