

From *exemplum virtutis* to *instrumentum utilitatis*, or, "those who can only conjugate will continue to decline": Classics at King's and Dalhousie from 1789-1950

Dr. Peter O'Brien, Carnegie Assistant Professor, Dalhousie/King's

Over the next 20 minutes my task is to account for the character of Classical Studies at two Universities, King's and Dalhousie, from the foundation of the former in 1789 and of the latter in 1818, until roughly 1950. I then yield the podium to Dr. Hankey, whose assignment is to characterise Classics on our joint campus from the mid-twentieth century until now. Our respective jobs are both ultimately agreeable ones, though one may feel that for Wayne, as both celebrant and celebrated at today's festivities, the transition is akin to great Virgil's as he moved Aeneas from his unsettled wanderings through the past to home soil in the victorious present. As Wayne takes my place, he may well be chanting under his breath, *maior rerum mihi nascitur ordo, / maius opus moveo*; "Now, Erato, thy poet's mind inspire, / And fill his soul with thy celestial fire! [...] A larger scene of action is display'd; / And, rising hence, a greater work is weigh'd." (cf. *Aen.* 7.37-44; trans. Dryden).

Both universities were founded at a point in history when Nova Scotia was a colony of Great Britain, each in response to different circumstances and pressures that gave each their own particular identity. King's came to be as a direct result of the American Revolution. Several individuals with connections to King's College, New York (an institution soon after reconstituted as Columbia University) began a fledgling new King's College in Windsor, N.S. in 1789. These included the refugee Loyalist, Dr. Charles Inglis (left), formerly Rector of Trinity Church, Wall Street, who had been consecrated the first Anglican Bishop of Nova Scotia a couple of years earlier, and Dr. William Cochran (right), another clergyman.



Cochran, a graduate of Trinity College Dublin, became the new College's first president and first professor in Greek and Latin.¹ Despite early attempts to form it otherwise, King's for many years remained narrowly Anglican, not just in the sense that it served as a regional seminary for training clergy, but also because it effectively limited enrolment to members of the Established Church. Inglis had hoped not only to pack the pulpits with Kingsmen, but also, in the words of

¹ The story is amply told in Fenwick Williams Vroom and University of King's College, *King's College : A Chronicle, 1789-1939: Collections and Recollections* (Halifax, N.S.: The Imperial publishing company limited, 1941), 160.

Henry Roper, "to create a cadre of leaders for the tory society [he] and his fellow Loyalists wished to create in Nova Scotia."² Since Anglicans never made up more than about 25% of the population, the College could not serve a broad cross-section of the province's inhabitants. In its reactive origins and staunch imperial affiliations, King's emulation of the mother country sometimes outdid the model in self-crippling ways. A requirement passed in 1803, for example, limited the presidency to graduates of Oxford and Cambridge only, requiring that Cochran be demoted permanently to Vice-President and supplanted by Dr. Charles Porter, pure English and Oxonian (left).³

Dalhousie's origins were also decidedly colonial, but with a different inflection. In 1817 George Ramsey, ninth Earl of Dalhousie, became Lieutenant Governor of Nova Scotia (right).



Partly in response to the inability of King's to support a broader student body, he proposed a new College in Halifax built, at least theoretically, on a secular foundation, as inspired by the universities in his native Scotland. Though it took decades to really get off the ground, Lord Dalhousie's new College also benefitted from American conflict: the proceeds of the British occupation of the port of Castine, Maine during the War of 1812 funded the initial enterprise.⁴

Despite their differences, what both colleges held in common was a BA curriculum based very solidly in math and Classics--the latter quite broadly construed in the sense that both philology and composition in Greek and Latin were required, as well as the heavy reading in Greek and Roman authors that supplied authoritative texts not only in literature and history, but also in formal rhetoric. Both had Matriculation (i.e. entrance) requirements in original-language reading that would give an undergraduate of today pause, if not palpitations. It would be exceedingly tedious to outline the various changes in curriculum through the 19th century. For present purposes just a couple of samples will suffice. So, for an idea of the full curriculum at the

² Henry Roper, "King's Traditions: A Lecture," University of King's College, <http://www.ukings.ca/news/kings-traditions-lecture-henry-roper> (accessed November 6, 2014).

³ Vroom, *King's College*, 47-52.

⁴ On the foundation of Dalhousie, see Peter B. Waite, *The Lives of Dalhousie University: Volume 1: 1818-1925: Lord Dalhousie's College* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1994), 3-26.

beginning of the century at King's we see how courses were divided between President Porter and Vice-President Cochran in 1814. Through the rest of the century, modern languages and natural sciences would be gradually added. For a sample of a slightly more diversified Classics curriculum at Dalhousie in by 1865, we have the following:

Greek:

1st year: Xenophon, *Anabasis*, Book IV; Homer, *Iliad*, Book IV; Greek prose composition

2nd year: Herodotus, Book I; Greek prose composition

3rd year: Euripides, *Hecuba*; Sophocles, *Antigone*; Greek prose composition

4th year: Thucydides, Book II; Greek prose composition.

Latin:

1st year: Cicero, *Orations against Catiline*; Virgil, *Aeneid*, Book VI; Latin prose composition

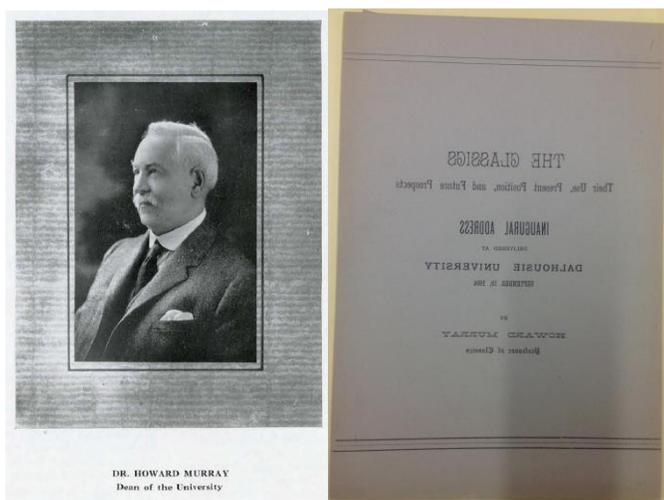
2nd year: Livy, Book XXI; Horace, *Epistles*; Latin prose composition

3rd year: Terence, *Adelphi*; Juvenal, *Satires*; Horace, *Ars Poetica*; Latin prose composition

4th year: Cicero, *De Officiis*; Tacitus, *Annals*; Latin prose composition

From this point of the near-exclusivity of Classics in the curriculum, I want to depart from chronological narrative and make a great leap forward to the 1950's. This is Wayne's territory, in fact, but he'll forgive me for taking a convenient vantage point. Even the youngest of us here has some inkling that by the second half of the 20th century, the university curriculum had vastly changed, both in terms of what was required of students, and in terms of the number of options that were available to them. In 1956, the Department of Classics at Dalhousie itself proposed to end the universal undergraduate requirement of Latin II, the normal first course in Latin at University since high-school Latin was still normally required at entrance. Any *obligation* for Greek had long since been done away with. Latin itself was to be replaced with Classical Literature in translation (a course now fallen into abeyance, but which I myself taught for the first six years of my appointment). The proposal was made ambivalently by classicists, but according Rainer Friedrich, was soon recognized to be a "blessing in disguise." Over the course of about a century, since the Dalhousie curriculum we just looked at was firmly in place, classics had gradually lost its power as a centre of gravity in the university. With the proliferation of colleges catering to a more diverse swathe of the population, Greek and Latin as shibboleths of elite privilege had lost their magic. Even more corrosive to their prowess were the natural sciences, which could turn mathematics into tools of analysis and persuasion and industrial productivity, where the ancient languages seemed handy only for negotiating social prestige. The concomitant importation of German scientific *Wissenschaft* into Classical Studies, with its strong historicist imperative, was only a complicating factor. When the Classics ceased to have a vital,

present meaning for students, so that they could really imagine their souls reflected in the mirror of Sophocles, Homer, or Virgil, they ceased to have relevance. In such a state of affairs, the pains required to attain the *forms* of classical studies, i.e. their languages, seemed hardly worth the effort. At this point of crisis, content had to be privileged over form by those who knew best that ancient thought had crucial things to teach the modern student. However important the languages would remain to those who aspired to know the ancient mind's intricacies, keeping the great ideas alive would depend on making them colloquial. To wage the battle on other terms would be to lose it. Already in 1894, Howard Murray, who gave nearly forty years of his life to teaching and administration at Dal (and whose legacy, The Howard Murray Fund, still benefits our students) had struck out on a valiant but parlous path. His inaugural speech as Munroe Professor in that year, taking note of the ascendancy of the natural sciences, is grimly entitled, "The Classics: Their Use, Present Position, and Future Prospects." One admires its pluck (and the fortitude of the audience who had to sit through its 27 single-spaced typeset script!), but its urgency is somewhat undermined by its strident tone. Its invocation of *utility* had already yielded a key piece of territory to the barbarians at the gate, brandishing their telescopes and test-tubes.



I make this foray into Wayne's domain to make a point about our Classical tradition of education as it bloomed in the 19th century and the unexpected similarities that connect it to our present practice. It is true that the paedagogical exclusivity of Greek and Latin was a metaphor for the social exclusivity that those who had it enjoyed, but it was never *merely* this. The process that saw philological attainment fall away from content, the idea that the classics could meaningfully inform a *lived* reality happened only latterly, in the 20th century. As people began to doubt the Classical measure of the good life, the bad cultural memories of those who wielded Greek and Latin merely as aristocratic club memberships, or as indices of abstract intelligence, or as abstruse skill sets, or as exquisite aesthetic code have, one suspects, unfairly coloured the earlier period before the philological fundamentalism began. I want to remind us of the ways that Classics informed the lives of its students organically. This is not to say that there weren't misapprehensions and misappropriations of the Classical past; or even interpretations that we might find obtuse or even sinister. But they show the resilience of this field to changes in understanding as well as the depth of possible receptions.

In the time remaining, I can do this reminding only by focusing on a few areas and presenting a few exemplary illustrations. In my research thus far, King's has yielded a bit more than Dalhousie has, though I suspect that there are many things to be discovered in the archives there (as well as at King's!) for those who look in the future.

I begin with the most obvious classical legacy: the space in which students were to do their living and learning. The original classical proportions of the central building at King's College in Windsor were designed to be dwelled within, not as authentic recreations of an ancient temple. The spirit of that tradition of architecture continued when the College was rebuilt in Halifax, and continues into this century with its new buildings.⁵



Halifax campus c. 1930



Another area in which a vigorous classical spirit seems to be alive is in various original literary productions, of the 19th century, especially poetry. There are some notable samples in the University archives, in English, in Latin, and sometimes in both languages, that shows a lively collegial literary spirit and which is by no means free from talent, wit, and true feeling. The archives includes two examples of poems written by Joseph Clinch and Alfred Gilpin in English in the 1820s, presumably when they were students.⁶ These were lovingly rendered into Latin hexameters by former President Porter in his retirement in England in the 1860's, printed in Halifax and apparently read at Encaenia. One passage from Gilpin's *Epistola Poetica ad amicam* gives a sense of the sentiment attached to learning the Classics at King's: PP

Sweet was the hour when with the instructing sage
 We sought the beauties of the Classic page,
 When Virgil's soft and winning numbers stole
 Their gentle way to the enraptured soul;
 When Homer's martial lay our bosom fired,

⁵ The Studley Campus at Dalhousie, beginning with the MacDonald Building in the early 20th century and ending with the Hicks A&A building and Dunn building in the 1950's, followed a decidedly Neo-Classicist style too. This was emphatically abandoned with the erection of new buildings in the 1960's and 70's, and the trend continues.

⁶ Clinch, Joseph Hart, c.1806-1884.

Entered King's (in Windsor) in 1826, aged 20, son of John Clinck, Clergyman, of Newfoundland; born in Newfoundland, educated at Poole, England.

And all the energy of arms inspired.
 When Tully's voice our fixed attention stayed,
 And all the power of eloquence displayed:
 Sweet was the hour Euripides employed
 To point those scenes our minds so much enjoyed.
 Sweet was the hour devoted to peruse
 Those nobler efforts of the tragic muse,
 Which all the griefs of Oedipus disclose,
 And touch our breasts with Philoctetes' woes.
 But sweeter still the time we set apart
 For knowledge meant to purify the heart,
 To elevate our thoughts to things above,
 And fill our souls with that celestial love
 Which warms and animates the Christian's breast,
 And smooths the way to his eternal rest.

There are also heavy classical overtones in the call to service that many Kingsmen heard in the past (as indeed many Kingsmen and Kingswomen continue to hear). The lists of alumni in various departments of public life at the local, provincial, national and indeed Imperial levels in the 19th century are very long indeed; these were not men who used their education to occupy elite sinecures. The premium they placed on the nobility of self-sacrifice in the interests of the state may have taken forms that we would today find tragic or even foolish, but they are obviously underwritten by a classical understanding of the relationship between individual and state. Look, for example, at the plaque in the chapel that commemorates First World War dead from King's. It says, *pro patria dimicantes pulchre occubuerunt*, "they went to their graves nobly fighting for their country." This is version of the Horatian cliché, *dulce et decorum est pro patria mori*, highly dubious since Wilfred Owen's use of it in a poem on gas warfare in France.



A more prominent monument to a fallen Kingsman is well known to Haligonians in the Welsford-Parker monument found in the Old Burial Grounds on Barrington St. This structure, patterned after a Roman triumphal arch, commemorates Maj. Augustus F. Welsford and Captain William B.C.A. Parker, both of whom died in 1855 during the battle of the great Redan, part of the Crimean War's Sebastopol campaign.⁷ While the community at large honours Welsford, a Kingsman, in the downtown monument, the University has honoured her alumnus since the 1850's with the a testimonial prize first offered by Dr. William Almon for the best Latin composition on the subject of Maj. Welsford written by a first-year Latin student. While the "Almon-Welsford Testimonial Prize" is still awarded by the college, most of the stipulations, save that it go to an undergraduate Latin student, have fallen away. Should they be reinstated?

The archive also holds evidence of some prize-winning Latin poetry that shows engagement with contemporary political affairs. In the *In memoriam Jacsoni Ducis* of Newman Wright Hoyles we have a specimen notable not so much for its admirable politics, but for the window it opens Loyalist descendent views on affairs south of the border in 1863.⁸ The subject of this "Jacson Dux," "cui cognomen Saxeo-vallo fuit," [PP title] was none other than Stonewall Jackson, the Confederate general, whose noble southern-agrarian virtues the author opposes to the brute might of the Yankees:



Stronger *in number* the fierce Northerners contend
 Harsh sanctified hunger for gold compels them.
 They provoke War, swelling with rage and arrogance;
 They seek domination, coin, filthy lucre.
 Yet the Southerners have taken glorious triumphs by Right,
 Trusting in Justice and in the help of God.

⁷ I was recently reminded of this monument's classical basis and important place in Halifax's architectural landscape by several student presentations in Dr. Emily Varto's class, "Ancient Art from the Pyramids to the Forum."

⁸ Hoyles (1844-1927; B.A. 1864) was the son of a premier of Newfoundland and went on to a distinguished legal career in Toronto, serving as Principal of Osgoode Hall Law School (vroom p. 99).

HEU! sileant musæ geniales; non mihi cura
 Vestibus ornari nec mihi festa placent.
 Nænia ferali dicitur inelytus heros; (27)
 Ploretur lacrymis mors inopina piis.
 Quis tamen ignorat contermina civica bella,
 Nec tremuit fratrum prælia cæca legens?
 Cognatæ geminæ gentes habitant Americam; *
 Conjunctas quondam distrahit ira modo.
 Prævalidi numero sævi certant *Boreales*;
 Sacra fames auri duraque cogit eos.
 Exacuunt Martem rabie fastuque tumentes;
 Imperium, nummos, lucra pudenda petunt.
Jure sed *Australes* claros retulere triumphos,
 Justitia freti subsidioque Dei:
 Nam patriæ fines salvos retinere laborant,
 Atque gerunt pura patria bella fide.

Another strong memory of the Classical tradition at King's persists in sculpture on campus. When we are greeted by the stone busts of Cicero and Demosthenes in the present library's reading room, we can recall that this pair once graced the dais in Convocation Hall in Windsor: graduands used to receive their degrees flanked by these stern visages on either side. My favourite enduring symbol of classicism at King's, however, is the high-relief tableau of Aeneas, Anchises, Ascanius and Creusa now overlooking the Halifax quad from above the doorway to Middle Bay. An Alumni gift of 1861, it also once decorated old Convocation Hall.



Presumably, the group was intended to recall the flight of the Roman hero Aeneas from the burning city of Troy. That hero left all to a marauding enemy, including his wife. Nevertheless, with his elderly father on his shoulders, and leading his young son by the hand, Aeneas would go on to build a new and greater city in Italy. That city would stand at the centre of an empire that understood present strength in terms of reverence for the past and careful

nurture for the future. In fact, the original Latin motto under the statuary in Windsor, taken from *Aen.* 2. 704, read *nec, nate, tibi comes ire recuso*, "My son, I am ready to go with you and be your companion." The panel was evidently intended to evoke paternal, filial, and imperial *pietas* in the descendants of Loyalists who had fled their burning homes in the "revolted colonies." What I find so moving in the sculpture's classicism is that it makes no concessions to historicist reconstruction either ancient Roman or 18th century: *this* Aeneas teaches his lesson as a mustachioed 19th-century British Hussar; he might be fighting in the Crimea with Welsford! And furthermore, Aeneas' *exemplum* has proved remarkably resilient with the passage of time and the relocation of the College in space. How could its donors have known that there would be a fire in 1920, and that King's would be reborn on new foundations in Halifax? In its new setting, the tableau seems likely to prompt edifying reflection from ever freshening perspectives in times to come.⁹

[Dal had its paragons of Classics before the memory of our present generation too. I mentioned Howard Murray. The stories of other figures await excavation in the archives. One feels that in the records of James De Mille (1833-1880) there may be things to discover. De Mille author of *A Strange Manuscript Found in a Copper Cylinder* was Professor of English and Rhetoric at Dalhousie from 1865, though before that he had been Professor of Classics at Acadia. His many novels also include two set in ancient Rome, and he is said to have relished all opportunities for conversational Latin, even while on fishing trips!]

I end my survey with the new King's Library, which Dr. Hankey did so much to help create. In keeping with the other buildings on campus, it is a beautiful Neo-Classical space for learning, but one graced with beautiful and useful modern amenities as well. [Indeed, among its invaluable human resources is its archivist, Ms. Janet Hathaway, a woman learned in King's lore whose assistance has been more than indispensable to our project today.] Our library is filled with classical texts which were treasured in the past and lived with at all times as present companions. In four distinct centuries at King's, they have even been taken as guides to the future. That their readers may occasionally have gotten their interpretations wrong or expressed their reverence for them in modes we can no longer accept today is beside the point. These texts remain for our continued consultation, in translation or in the original. If 225 years is any indication of durability, they will for years to come. But that is a topic for my colleague to address.

⁹ Tom Curran offers one timeless perspective on the sculpture from 2007: "Our College is a living inheritance, and the symbol of the Penates in our Quad are a constant reminder that we did not build this College but inherited it from others; we move ahead, but never by turning our backs on our founders and benefactors, who have made us what we are."