

## INVENTION OR MISDIRECTION? Montreal 1875

“Some say that no one ever leaves Montreal, for that city, like Canada itself, is designed to preserve the past, a past that happened somewhere else.”<sup>1</sup> (Leonard Cohen)

Montreal between 1850 to 1880 is presented as the most innovative hotbed of sports in history. In just 20 years this city "invents" lacrosse, hockey, American football, and if James Naismith had continued teaching at McGill University one more year - perhaps basketball. What is the coincidence that four of the five major North American sports were all founded in Montreal in a thirty year period? And we know nothing about how baseball was really formed, so who knows, Montreal might be able to claim that sport also.

How is that possible? The obvious answer is that it wasn't. Nothing was "invented" in Montreal. That story is a big misdirection. So what happened in Montreal, specifically regarding the supposed "first game of organized hockey" in 1875? It becomes obvious with even just a little investigation that this is not the first hockey game played on ice, as many ice games are documented long before 1875 in England and Canada (as the excellent book *On the Origin of Hockey* by Giden, Houda and Martel shows). The 1875 game appears to be some sort of marker. One question to ask is, what is that marker, and who is doing the marking?

Most hockey historians will claim that the "inventor" of modern hockey is James George Alwin Creighton, organized the first recorded Canadian game in 1875.<sup>2</sup> Amazingly, he is NOT in the Hockey Hall of Fame. Let that sink in. The supposed inventor of the sport is not in its Hall of Fame! I find this omission to be very strange.

Creighton was born in 1850 in Halifax, Nova Scotia. His father was part of the shipping and wholesale food business. He received an HBA from King's College in 1868 (later associating with Dalhousie University). Soon after he became a survey worker for Sandford Fleming (the engineer-in-chief for the Inter-Colonial Railway and known today as the inventor of everything). We will come back to Fleming's connection later; I think he's also very important to this story. Back to Creighton, he

1 Leonard Cohen in *The Favorite Game* <https://www.azquotes.com/quote/1160200>

2 Information on Creighton mostly from [http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/creighton\\_james\\_george\\_aylwin\\_15E.html](http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/creighton_james_george_aylwin_15E.html),  
[https://sihrhockey.org/\\_a/public/creighton.cfm](https://sihrhockey.org/_a/public/creighton.cfm)

moved to Montreal in 1872, and became an engineer on such projects as the Lachine Canal and Montreal Harbour. During his time in Montreal he became a member of several clubs including the Victoria Skating Club. Beyond being a hockey pioneer, he later went to work for the Senate in Ottawa, and also “amazingly” became a part of the Rideau Hall Rebels, with the sons of the Governor General, Lord Stanley of Preston. This is the person who would create the Stanley Cup. Creighton's connection to the Stanley Cup tends to be overlooked. We will get to that also.

The claim is that he began to organize early morning games with his friends from McGill University as early as 1873 (perhaps bribing the caretaker to have access to the rink on Sundays). There is no direct evidence for this, only claims of the last surviving player, Henry Joseph in the 1930s. We do know that Creighton was a team captain in the 1875 game, and also for a few of the games in subsequent years. He himself never had anything to say about his involvement in these games. Part of the historical claim is that he took the ball-and-stick ice games of his youth from the ponds of Nova Scotia to Montreal. Generally this gets presented as meaning the games of the British colonials. The local Nova Scotia Mi'kmaq Natives and their ice games have been presented as having a connection to the origin of hockey, but few have really seen just how much that may be. Recall that for several decades the Mi'kmaq were the only ones in Canada that seemed able to make proper hockey sticks. They were likely using a flat wooden disk for their ice games for at least a century, and had been using bone skates long before the new iron and steel models began to appear in the 1800s. The Indigenous Peoples connection will demand an entire chapter to properly assess their part of the real origin story of hockey. Suffice to say, there is no proof of exactly what ice games Creighton played as a kid, or what rules he did or did not use for those games. So again why Montreal, 1875 and James Creighton? And why for several years do only the sons of the British elite play in hockey games?<sup>3</sup>

The announcement for a new game to be played at the Victoria Skating Rink was made in the March 3rd *Montreal Gazette* newspaper, that was likely in fact written by Creighton himself (in the future becoming a writer for both the *Gazette* and several book companies):

*“Victoria Rink - A game of Hockey will be played at the Victoria Skating Rink this evening, between two nines chosen from among the members. Good fun may be expected, as some of the players are reputed to be exceedingly expert at the game. Some fears have been expressed on the part of intending spectators that accidents were likely to occur through the ball flying about in too lively a manner, to the imminent danger of lookers on, but we understand that the game will be played with a flat circular piece of wood, thus preventing all danger of its leaving the surface of the ice. Subscribers will be admitted on presentation of their tickets.”*

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3 Key sources for the examination of the early games in Montreal are at the SIHR.org early hockey database.

Both sides in the game had nine skaters, though no one can say why this number was chosen. If we take a look at the games that were played on ponds or lakes, open ice shinny or hurley could have as many as 50 players per side, so needed to be reduced given the confined space of the Victoria Rink. But why nine and not seven or fifteen? Fifteen would have made sense if this was supposed to be a winter rugby practice, as much of the legend suggests.

This announcement gives us a few key pieces of information. The first is that it is using the term hockey, and not giving any explanation of what the name means. Secondly it says that some of the players are “reputed” to be exceedingly expert, though it seems no one has ever seen them play. It would also indicate that even seeing them, no one would be able to “rate their ability.” The paper is thus suggesting that anyone viewing this ice game would have no idea what was going on. It also indicates that a flat piece of wood (the word puck not used in Canadian print until 1876) would be used, as a way to “avoid injuring spectators.” The article is all about promotion, trying to draw a crowd, thus the flat disk is all about spectator safety, not its importance (over a ball) in the ice game being played.

If this first match was really about showcasing a new sport, as some have tended to present, then Creighton would have asked 14 or 15 players from Nova Scotia (where the game was supposed to originate), and bring them to Montreal to show off their top skills. What we have here instead are a bunch of Montreal elite, who were young, athletic, and soon to be rich, showcasing a sport that they possibly had little life-connection with. I don't really think this was some idea Creighton had to showcase a sport from his youth, this was more of a plan much higher up the ladder. Creighton was likely just the chosen front man to make it happen.

The game was played at the Victoria Skating Rink (seen in illustration 1), which had an ice surface of 204 feet by 80 feet. All arenas since 1875 have pretty much mirrored the definitions of the Victoria Rink, as if without even knowing it, enshrining the Victoria Arena as the “original temple of hockey.” And I don't mean that lightly. I get the sense the Victoria Skating Rink was held in some sort of “religious esteem” prior to this exhibition game, and somehow elevated itself in the years that followed. Recall that in the near future, this arena would be the site of Lord Stanley's first view of hockey during the Winter Carnival of 1889, the first Stanley Cup playoff game in 1894, and was where the first telegraph wires would be set up to move play by play back to Winnipeg marking a new step in sport and technology in Canada.

It had been built solely as a skating facility for the wealthy, and was known for its many “fancy dress-type” ball functions. Its location at 49 Drummond Street (now 1187), put the arena into the area of Montreal known as the “Golden Square Mile,” where Montreal's rich British businessmen lived. Other rinks for the “lower classes” would be built in other locations around the city. The arena originally had 500 gas lights to shine at night, while a band performed for the skaters, but later it became the first building with electricity in Canada. It was sold in 1925 after the building of the Forum (the new

temple of hockey), and the Victoria site was turned into a parking garage

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The next day, March 4, came the first hockey game report, again in the *Gazette*, and again likely written by Creighton:

*“HOCKEY -- At the Rink last night a very large audience gathered to witness a novel contest on the ice. The game of hockey, though much in vogue on the ice in New England and other parts of the United States, is not much known here, and in consequence the game of last evening was looked forward to with great interest. Hockey is played usually with a ball, but last night, in order that no accident should happen, a flat block of wood was used, so that it should slide along the ice without rising, and thus going among the spectators to their discomfort. The game is like Lacrosse in one sense -- the block having to go through flags placed about 8 feet apart in the same manner as the rubber ball -- but in the main the old country game of shinty gives the best idea of hockey. The players last night were eighteen in number -- nine on each side -- and were as follows: -- Messrs. Torrance (captain), Meagher, Potter, Goff, Barnston, Gardner, Griffin, Jarvis and Whiting. Creighton (captain), Campbell, Campbell, Esdaile, Joseph, Henshaw, Chapman, Powell and Clouston. The match was an interesting and well-contested affair, the efforts of the players exciting much merriment as they wheeled and dodged each other, and notwithstanding the brilliant play of Captain Torrance's team Captain Creighton's men carried the day, winning two games to the single of the Torrance nine. The game was concluded about half-past nine, and the spectators then adjourned well satisfied with the evening's entertainment”<sup>4</sup>*

The SIHR web archive has managed to find the first names of these players, as well as provide biographies of them: Charles E. **Torrance** (captain), Daniel **Meagher**, Thomas J. **Potter**, Edwin H. **Gough**, William M.S. **Barnston**, George W. **Gardner**, W.O. **Griffin**, Francis **Jarvis** and a fellow named **Whiting**. The other team was composed of James G.A. **Creighton** (captain), Robert **Esdaile**, Henry **Joseph**, Frederick C. **Henshaw**, William B. **Chapman**, Robert H.W. **Powell** and Edward S. **Clouston**, along with brothers Stewart **Campbell** and George **Campbell**. We will get back to these names in a moment.

The March 4 article says there was a very large audience, while other sources (such as Michael McKinley<sup>5</sup>) have suggested the actual number present was forty. Nowhere have I seen a verifiable number for the spectators present. The article says that the sport is “much in vogue on the ice in New England and other parts of the US.”

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<sup>4</sup> *Montreal Gazette* March 4, 1875

<sup>5</sup> McKinley *Putting a Roof On Winter*

Does the newspaper mean that literally? That an ice sport, called hockey, was not just being played- but was popular in the Eastern United States? Most historians try to present that this reference in the article meant various games on the ice such as shinny, bandy, or ice polo- but given that Creighton was likely the writer of this article (or at least what we for sure can call the source), this should be taken as a direct pointer. The question no one was asking was, with which group was the sport popular with, and what happened to all this hockey in the Northeast USA? Granted several articles and books through the 1880s described an American stick and ball ice version known as Ice Polo that held great popularity (which was different from Canadian hockey in the sense of having a bigger outdoor surface, heavier sticks, a ball, and no offside rule as would come in Canada).

As for this game in Montreal, the newspaper report tells us very little about the rules. The article compared the game to lacrosse (already popular in Montreal), but claimed that the block must go through flags (I would assume meaning poles frozen in the ice with flags on top. Why one needs flags is not really explained). The article compared the game more to shinty, the Scottish game. What is interesting is that it was not compared to hurley (the Irish game) which is supposed to be what early ice games in Canada were known as. A big part of this 1875 game was about “presentation,” of and for, the Scottish-British contingent in Montreal. There are only English-Scottish sounding last names among the players. This would be the norm for most of the next fifteen years. Right from the beginning, the game's “official source” the *Montreal Gazette* is all about “creating an image.” We will see that other papers (not focused on the image making) had a completely different report about this first game.

Also there is no mention of hitting in the game (or any kind of contact at all), just that players “wheeled and dodged.” If there had been any hitting, I am sure the article would have mentioned this as it would have been a unique feature. A depiction of this game in the documentary “Hockey a People's History: Episode 1”, showed a number of players being hit and smashed. But there is no such evidence that hitting of any kind took place. That is not to say it didn't, but there is no reference in the article, and it does not seem likely once one begins to understand what this March 3 game really was. I suggest that this game would have appeared more like a group of buddies going out to “shoot some hoops” after work. It would have been “competitive” in that they would like to win their contest, but not competitive enough that they would want to injure any of their fellow participants. These are all very connected men, all in the same elite clubs, and all going to same McGill University. This is not smash 'em up hockey as so many historians have wanted to present, which is another part of the legend origin story as years went on. However it seems someone did in fact get smashed at the first game.

Lets look at an article that appeared in another paper, the *Montreal Witness* on March 4 1875:

*"Hockey in the Victoria Skating Rink-Last evening a game of hockey was played in the Victoria Skating Rink between two nines (lists the players). The game is generally played with a large rubber ball, each side trying to knock it through the bounds of the other's field. In order to spare the heads and nerves of the spectators, last evening, a flat piece of board was used instead of a ball, it slid about between the players with great velocity, the result being that the Creighton team won two games to one for the Torrance. Owing to some boys skating about during the play, and unfortunate disagreement arose, one little boy was struck across the head, and the man who did so was afterwards called to account, a regular fight taking place in which a bench was broken and other damage caused. It was the intention of the players to have another game, but this disgraceful affair put a stopper on it."*<sup>6</sup>

So we find there was more to this game than the *Gazette* mentioned. Before we get to the incident, it tells little of the game itself. Just that the game is "generally played" with a large rubber ball. So where is it "generally being played?" And why does the article suggest it must be knocked through the bounds of the other's field? That is very strange language, with no mention of goals, posts or flags like in the *Gazette*. This sounds very much more like a field sport being compared with. If ice sports were so popular, as suggested in the standard historical narrative, then every reporter should have seen hundreds of examples of games on ice during their life to compare with. So why be so confounded by it? To be honest, it is almost as though whoever is presenting this report in the paper has no idea what they were watching. For Canada in 1875, that strikes me as very strange.

Then the *Witness* article described a "disagreement" with boys used to having the rink for their own skating. The article claims one boy was "struck across the head." Lovely gesture. Then seemingly a fight between the boy's parents and the players occurred. Another similar newspaper report has long been claimed in books to have come from the Kingston Whig Standard. I have looked through the paper for the month of March 1875, and did not find any such report. Again the SIHR came to the rescue and found that the paper who covered the story was in fact The Times of Ottawa who presented that *"A disgraceful sight took place at Montreal in the Victoria Rink over a game of hockey. Shins and heads were battered, benches smashed, and the lady spectators fled in confusion."*<sup>7</sup>

What does seem certain here is that something did happen during the hockey game at the Victoria Rink, and there was some sort of fight between players and spectators connected to the skating club, which did cause the game to be stopped. And it sounds brutal; shins and heads were battered, benches smashed. Why does *the Gazette* not make any mention of it? This is a very important question. It will make more sense when you have read the upcoming chapter on the Snowshoe and

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<sup>6</sup> *Montreal Witness* March 4 1875

<sup>7</sup> McKinley *Putting a Roof On Winter* p6, SIHR Origins reference database

Lacrosse Clubs of Montreal, for to realize that this “game” was not just a foray into starting a new winter sport, it was also a marketing tool to set up a Canadian identity, and also to give the “upper-middle class” an activity to identify themselves as Canadian.

There is a lot wrapped up in this 1875 experiment. Sports were taken at the time by the British as a means to learn proper adult skills. As written by Paul Kitchen *"Sporting competition promoted discipline, co-operation, fair play, gentlemanly conduct, resolve, respect for teammates and opponents, and overall proper behavior."*<sup>8</sup> Thus anything that might shine a “bad light” on the players or sporting endeavors needed to be quietly ignored. This ignorance by *The Gazette* is one of the most important pieces to come out of this game, presenting that everything looked nice, when obviously it was a chaotic mess. But again, animosity was NOT between the players, who likely behaved in a very fraternal fashion with each other.

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I looked into several of the names that appear in the listings as those who played in this first game and asked, what can we know about these people?<sup>9</sup>

We start with the other team's captain, Charles E. Torrance. He had fought in the Fenian Raids of 1866 and 1870 (as many of the other early players had as well). His grandfather, John Torrance, was Director of the Bank of Montreal and “was one of the wealthiest men in Montreal,” including having a 42-room stone mansion that included gardens, orchards, and wineries. Like just about everyone connected with all of hockey origins (including Creighton), Charles attended went on to study at McGill University. After graduating he became an agent importing tea from the Far East. Later he became President of the Victoria Skating Club.

On Creighton's team, we have Frederick C. Henshaw, who was also a Lt. Colonel of the Victoria Rifles, and sat on the Board of Directors for Montreal Street Railways, the Marconi Wireless Telegraph Co. and various banks. By 1888, he was Vice President of the Montreal Football Club, President of the Victoria Skating Club, and honorary President of the Victoria Hockey Club. Some reports have suggested that it was he (not Creighton) who was importing sticks and pucks from Nova Scotia, due to his wife being the daughter of Nova Scotia coalmine owner John McDougall. Henshaw was also the President of the St. George Snow Shoe Club in the early 1880's and later held the position Consul of the Argentine Republic.

Another member on Creighton's team was Edward Clouston, who was the president of the Bank of Montreal, an advisor to several Canadian finance ministers, and who went on to be one of the trustees of the Allan Cup and the Minto Cup. He is

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<sup>8</sup> Kitchen *Win Lose or Wrangle* p13

<sup>9</sup> SIHR 1875 player biographies, and portrait plates found in the McCord Museum of Montreal

also claimed to have been the captain for the famous 1874 Harvard-McGill football game. His Wikipedia page is loaded with all sorts of banking and finance information, and how he was one of the first five Montreal residents to own a car, with no mention whatsoever about his “important” hockey background or being a part of this first hockey game.<sup>10</sup>

Another of Creighton’s teammates was Henry Joseph, who apparently also played in that famous 1874 McGill versus Harvard football game. What made that game famous is that there are claims that “the rules of the game were altered as the game continued, with Joseph’s assistance.” Also Joseph was claimed to be the founder of ice lacrosse in February 1875 (even though there is a listing of an ice lacrosse game played at the Victoria Skating Rink in 1871). So what luck, one of the players of the first hockey game was also a rules inventor in three “ball and stick” sports within a span of two years! And by the way, he also happened to have competed at one of the first US Open Tennis Championships. He was the last surviving member of the original group of players, and it was he who presented the information as to how Creighton had been the organizer of the entire first hockey game in an interview in Montreal Gazette (either in 1936 or 1943). But there is more. Joseph also became President of the Windsor Hotel, the very hotel where the NHL was founded in 1917. He finished out his life buying many properties in British Columbia in an area known as “Millionaires’ Row.”<sup>11</sup>

The rest of the players will be a brief overview: George and Stewart Campbell came from a Scottish line of wealthy landowners and also played football; William Chapman was a merchant and one of the founders of the Metropolitan Club in 1874 (that played in a key hockey game in 1877 that will later be presented); Robert Esdaile was a wholesale broker and one of the founders of the Montreal Corn Exchange, and also a founder of the Metropolitan Club; Robert Powell was a doctor, and not just any doctor but the personal physician for Canadian Prime Minister Sir John A. MacDonald in Ottawa; William Barnston and George Garner were stockbrokers; Henry Gough was a clerk at the Bank of Montreal; W.O. Griffin was known for his lacrosse play; while Francis Jarvis and Tomas Potter were book keepers. The player called “Whiting” in the newspaper still remains unknown.

This is the pedigree of the players listed as taking part in the first game. Why does this group of elite, soon to be rich, want to take part in a rough and tumble new sport of hockey? Unless, as I mentioned earlier, the game was not so rough and tumble and was very “gentlemanly” and refined. Yet if this was a type of fraternal ritual, even an initiation (not for the people involved but of a sport or an organization), it would all make much more sense.

There is one final name on the first hockey players list I have not discussed, that

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<sup>10</sup> <https://www.vernonmorningstar.com/community/first-hockey-game-was-played-in-summerland/>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.vernonmorningstar.com/community/first-hockey-game-was-played-in-summerland/>, Joseph football reference <https://www.mcgill.ca/channels/news/date-history-first-football-game-was-may-14-1874-106694>, McKinley Putting a Roof p6



being Torrance's teammate Daniel Meagher. Granted there is not much to say about Daniel other than he was a medical doctor in Montreal. The connection is to his brother George, claimed to be the "magical" father of hockey EVERYWHERE in Europe. George Meagher (born in Kingston in 1866) was one of the world's first figure skating champions. He went to Paris on a figure skating exhibition in 1894 and was claimed to be "surprised" that the French were not familiar with hockey. By some freak chance, George just happened to have 12 hockey sticks with him on his trip. Because as you know, every figure skater who travels across the globe also needs to carry along a dozen sticks! While in Paris, he is claimed to have formed both the Paris Hockey Club and the Club des Patineurs de Paris (so each would have someone to play). The story might seem plausible if it stopped there...but alas it continues. He then went on to London, and formed a hockey league there, and then in Glasgow Scotland where he also did hockey exhibitions. He then did the same in Nuremberg Germany, and then in St Petersburg Russia where he explained, "Hockey is going to take here (St. Petersburg) as it has in other cities, it is exciting, scientific, and an excellent exhibition game, so why shouldn't it be popular."<sup>12</sup>

This magic origin story for how hockey spreads is going to turn up again and again to explain how hockey came to such places as Winnipeg and Toronto. Just by chance someone shows up "surprised" no one is playing hockey, and either has some sticks, or sends for some, and there goes the sport. But in each case, these stories will be shown as a type of fabricated myth. And when you see these stories of hockey's origins are a type of legend, then one can start from scratch with everything we think we know. What are the myths attempting to hide or cover over? And why does Meagher bring hockey to Russia in 1894, where he thinks it will become incredibly popular, but then seemingly no one knows anything about the sport again until 1946 (the country only playing bandy up to that point)?

George Meagher has more hockey connections. He wrote three figure skating books, including the 1895 *Lessons in Skating*, which somehow had Lord Stanley (yes that Lord Stanley) write the forward. But there is more. His older sister Mary married Montreal alderman William Farrell, And their son Arthur went on not only to be a star on the Stanley Cup champion Montreal Shamrocks in 1899 and 1900, but who was also inducted into the Hockey Hall of Fame in 1965. More so, it was Art Farrell who wrote the first book about hockey in Canada in 1899 (others had come out in the US previously) and has so many odd parts to it I had to include an overview of the book in a separate chapter. Meagher also ends up with an odd obituary (as men like James Creighton will also have) and whose burial certificate described him as an "artist."<sup>13</sup>

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A second hockey game on March 16, 1875 was reported in the *Gazette*, this time between two named teams; the Victoria Skating Club and the Montreal Football

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<sup>12</sup> Shea, Kevin *Lord Stanley* p316, <https://skateguard1.blogspot.com/2015/01/george-alfred-meagher-champion-figure.html>

<sup>13</sup> Shea p316

Club. *The Montreal Gazette* presented that; *"the players will be in uniform this time, which will add greatly to their own comfort and ease, we should imagine, and will certainly lend additional picturesque attraction to the game."* This writing style sounds very similar to how Creighton wrote in his chapters in *Picturesque Canada* in 1882.

Creighton was presented as the captain of the Football Nine, and his side wore sweaters with red and black stripes while their opponents wore white shirts. A note about all the newspaper game reports from Montreal in the 1870s: while they do include a list of all the players and the final score, there is no information about who scored, how long the game was played (either by time or number of goals), nor if penalty infractions occurred. At the same time it has been found that in England, newspapers as far back as 1870 were reporting on games of ice hockey and bandy, which often included the names of goal scorers, and, in one case, even the times of the goals. The absence of not reporting who scored in the games played in Montreal seems odd.

As for the game itself, again the *Montreal Gazette* the day after that second game, was there to give its overview. After again listing all the players the paper claimed:

*"Captain Creighton whose individual play deserves special encomium, did all he could to get his men together and make them play into each other's hands, but to no purpose. They seemed to have lost that organized system which distinguished their play at the beginning of the afternoon and the result was a well deserved victory for their opponents, who certainly did play exceedingly well and with remarkable science."*

This is an important article. Right away there is discussion of "team play" and systems, and by not playing as a team is the reason why Creighton's team lost. Most importantly is that the winning team was said to play with "remarkable science." We will see that this choice of key words, playing sports as a "science," will be an important component for the British colonialists to present the reason why they are the "inventors" of a previously unskilled and unscientific Native pastime. Their science and organization is what was needed before something can be called a sport. Many of the layers that will be brought out in this book about why and how hockey was "invented" in Montreal are already apparent in the newspaper reports of 1875. Please also recall that in another co-incidence of 1875, the Field Hockey Association of England was formed and put out its first set of rules on April 10. Hockey is magically forming worldwide, on ice and on the field, and within a month of each other.<sup>14</sup>

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14 The year 1875 was not an easy time for Montreal. A *Montreal Gazette* article on December 15, 1875 was discussing the continent-wide depression that was leading to starvation in the slums of Montreal. Earlier in the year two banks had collapsed, Montreal factories were shut down because no one was buying goods. *"The Protestant House of Industry and Refuge was bending under the strain of people seeking relief. Among them was a man long out of work who, to keep his children warm, had to leave all three of them bundled together in bed. "Others," the House of Industry reported, "were obliged to burn articles of their furniture to keep them from freezing."* It was leading to a case of civil unrest by the population against the mayor and the ruling class of the city, and 200 police were called in to control protesters at City Hall. I just mention that a city-wide depression and outrage of the working-class against the ruling class was occurring exactly at the time a few young men from McGill decide to "market" a new sport. Starvation stalked the

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Now that the basis of hockey in 1875 has been presented, we can get back to the very co-incidental life of James Creighton.<sup>15</sup> A direct connection is to Sanford Fleming, who hired Creighton out of university and sent him to Montreal for his works projects. Often overlooked, but presented by hockey historian Paul Kitchen, is that *"Fleming was an excellent skater, and at his 25th anniversary he thought there was no better way to celebrate than to have a skating party at his personal rink at his Ottawa Sandy Hill residence."*<sup>16</sup> Thus the key backer of Creighton's professional life was also a skater from Nova Scotia, and likely would have had knowledge of any outdoor hockey games taking place in that province. Fleming also had a personal outdoor rink at his house in Ottawa, long before Lord Stanley's rink was being discussed. The two Nova Scotia skating enthusiasts do not stay geographically apart for long, as Creighton soon joined Fleming in Ottawa.

One of Fleming's key chroniclers was George Munro Grant, who wrote a best-selling book at the time about Fleming's crossing of the Rockies. I mention Grant as he later also connects with Creighton, as Creighton will be one of the writers of Grant's historical book series Picturesque Canada in 1882. Fleming would work together with Grant in the 1880s as Chancellor and President of Queens University in Kingston (even though he quit school at the age of 14). Fleming became a Freemason in 1854, and was later fully knighted into the order of St. Michael and St. George, the same order that both Creighton and Grant would also gain access to, as companions but not full knights. One must ask why Creighton (whose accomplishments are nothing compared to Grant and Fleming), winds up in the same British Knight class, unless it is to include his hockey origin background? However it seems Creighton never spoke to anyone about his being the founder and organizer of hockey. His name doesn't even appear in print connected with hockey until after he is dead, that being the Henry Joseph interview that claimed Creighton was the 1875 game's organizer. In another co-incidence, Sandford Fleming is buried in Beechwood Cemetery in Ottawa, where many of the founders of hockey, including James Creighton, are also buried.<sup>17</sup>

Creighton was also an early football player, and he was a key member of a meeting in Toronto in October 1875 to organize an inter-provincial association. The previous year (1874) he wrote a testimonial for spring skates for the Starr Manufacturing Company of Dartmouth. By 1880 Creighton had finished his McGill law courses, and joined a law firm in Montreal. On March 3, 1882, he accepted a position as a law clerk of the Senate in Ottawa, where he preferred to be known as Aylwin, his middle name. Creighton became the parliamentary counsel to the Senate in 1909 and

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streets of Montreal John Kalbfleisch • Special to the *Montreal Gazette*

•<https://montrealgazette.com/sponsored/mtl-375th/from-the-archives-starvation-stalked-the-streets-of-montreal>

15 Key detail of Creighton can be found in Bill Fittell's article at [http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/creighton\\_james\\_george\\_aylwin\\_15E.html](http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/creighton_james_george_aylwin_15E.html) on his brother's death in the Montreal Witness July 11, 1881, and various articles on the SIHR.org website

16 Kitchen, *Win Lose or Wrangle* p.8

17 Biographi.ca articles on both men, [https://freemasonry.bcy.ca/biography/fleming\\_s/fleming\\_s.html](https://freemasonry.bcy.ca/biography/fleming_s/fleming_s.html)

stayed in the position until his death in 1930. His initial appointment to the Senate was March 3 1882, the same day (March 3) he is supposed to be “founding of hockey” in 1875. That is not some freak co-incidence, it is a hidden message to those that can see it.

James Creighton was also an author and historian, and wrote two chapters in the 1882 Munro Grant book *Picturesque Canada: The country as it was and is*. Creighton's two chapters were titled, "French Canadian Life and Character" in volume one, and "The History of the Lower Saguney," in volume two. So he seemed to have claimed quite a knowledge of French-Canadian history. Which he might have well had. The chapters were well written, with plenty of praise for the habitant farmer, and much detailed presentation of nature and scenery. The question I have is how exactly did a man only in Montreal for less than ten years, with a background in law and engineering become such an expert in the history, thoughts and ideas of the French-Canadian farmer? Creighton also wrote the book *Origins of the Northwest Mounted Police*, as well as some fishing and outdoors pieces in other magazines and books of the period.

However what does get our attention is the chapter that follows his in the first *Picturesque* volume, which is about the city of Montreal. Oddly he did not write this chapter, but it was written by Reverend AJ Bray and John Lesperance. In that chapter they described the Winter Sports Scene in Montreal:

*"But Montreal is more interested in outdoor sports and in organizing amusements than in art. The Victoria skating club, whose famous rink on Drummond Street, one of the first erected on this continent, has been the scene of many brilliant fancy-dress entertainments, which Royalty and nobility have graced. These 'carnivals' on the ice were first instituted here, and have since become popular elsewhere. There are three curling clubs- the Caledonia, Montreal and Thistle-with a Canadian branch of the Royal Caledonia curling club of Scotland...snow-shoeing has been reduced to an art" He then gives a long discussion about how much he enjoys snow shoeing. Lacrosse is the 'national game' of Canada, and in that character it had its birth in Montreal. Four or five years ago, a select team make the tour of England, and had the honor of playing before Her Majesty at Windsor." Then speaks of the local Indians losing their supremacy in the sport. "There is also a golf club established in 1873, a bicycle club, football club, and a chess club, which numbers among its members some of the strongest and most brilliant players in the country."*<sup>18</sup>

The chapter also discusses that there are also clubs for the protection of fish and game, one society to prevent cruelty to animals, as well as clubs for boating, bicycling, and yachting. Meanwhile page 130 has a plate that is labeled "Government

house from the skating pond" with three couples together skating on the ice, and two parents with two children each.

So what is missing in that description? If you said hockey, you win a prize. Here is a chapter touting the greatness and innovation of Montreal, its finest chess players, great curling rinks, even saying it was the founder of lacrosse...but the article does not once mention that a new sport was recently invented in that city. A bicycle club is mentioned, but not hockey. Creighton himself did not write the article, but he was associated with the book as an author, and he was an obvious well-known sportsman in the city; you would think the Reverend and Creighton might have met once or twice. I just find it a very odd omission when the chapter is all designed to present the "specialness" of Montreal, and lists EVERYTHING about Montreal sports- with the exception of hockey. Not even a mention that games like hurley or shinny on the ice had been played by "thousands of young sports minded folks" for many years. Stick-and-ball games on the ice seemed to just not exist in the mind of the book writers.

But James' Creighton's hockey luck is not done yet. He became a founding member of a new hockey team in 1889 in Ottawa that included the two sons of Governor-General Lord Stanley. It is through this team, The Rideau Hall Rebels, that not only will hockey be barnstormed and grown across the Province of Ontario, but in just three years the Governor-General would purchase a new hockey challenge trophy that would later become the Stanley Cup. Thus, Creighton was also directly involved with the person that created the Stanley Cup. But his Ottawa hockey connection raises a couple of questions.

He moved to Ottawa in 1882, and the following year the Ottawa Hockey Club started, again very co-incidental to Creighton's arrival. The story claims that the team formed after two or three young men from Ottawa watched games played at the Montreal Winter Carnival. Creighton was not one of them, nor was he part of the organization on the return to Ottawa. Why was Creighton not involved with the first hockey team? He would have known about its creation, he was in the same clubs as the founding players, and the team was discussed in the various city newspapers. Many of those players (as I will show in a future chapter) turned out to be transplants from McGill University to Ottawa, and as such they all should have known Creighton personally. Why is he not involved? Something is odd with the presentation that he is nowhere to be found around the formation of hockey in Ottawa. However when the next "big thing" hockey-wise is rolled out, there he is front and center. This new 1889 parliamentary team nicknamed "the Rebels," has many oddities surrounding them, and they will be examined in chapter six.

Also co-incidentally, James Creighton was a cousin of famous Canadian folklorist Mary Helen Creighton, another (of course) McGill graduate (in music). She was born in Dartmouth, Nova Scotia in 1899, and lived for one hundred years. Using grants from the Rockefeller Foundation, *"She collected over 4,000 traditional songs, stories, and beliefs in a career that spanned several decades, and she published*

many books and articles on Nova Scotia folk songs and folklore. She received numerous honorary degrees for her work and was made a Member of the Order of Canada in 1976.” There was later criticism of her work by historian Ian MacKay in his book *Quest of the Folk* who claimed Helen was creating a type of “Scottish commodification” to connect the upper elite with the working class by appropriating older folk songs. In a sense making people believe that Nova Scotia really is “New Scotland” and not a conglomerate of Native Peoples, French Acadians and British colonists. It is an interesting criticism that just as well may be leveled on the elite in Montreal sports.<sup>19</sup> I bring this up as a discussion point, that perhaps James Creighton was less an inventor, or more of an archivist like Helen? Was he bringing something “back from the long forgotten past?”

There is another famous Creighton historian in Canada. That would be Donald Creighton, born in 1902 in Toronto, and might have links to our story. His most famous book was published in 1937 titled *The Commercial Empire of the St-Lawrence, 1760–1850*. It was a study of “the English merchant class in relation to the St Lawrence River in Canada.” Recall this is the same area of historical subjects, the southern part of Quebec, that James Creighton also wrote about in *Picturesque Canada*. That Donald's best known historical work is about the British elite of Quebec in early 1800s is also coincidental. Wikipedia claims that Donald became criticizer of the ruling Liberal Party in the 1940s for “undermining Canada's link with Great Britain and moving towards closer relations with the United States, a policy which he strongly disliked.” This again seems remarkably similar to very reasons I am claiming (in chapter two) that hockey would be taken by the British and used to create a unique (non American) identity for Canada. In 1944 Donald wrote *Dominion of the North- a history of Canada*, quite literally becoming the go-to work for the history in many schools. Donald claimed he was writing his history to combat against “the so-called “Liberal Interpretation” of Canadian history that would ultimately lead to Canada being absorbed into the United States.”<sup>20</sup>

James Creighton lived in Ottawa until his death in 1930, a member of the Skating Club and the prestigious Rideau Club. Any comments that have been written about him by fellow people who knew him were all exemplary. His funeral was attended by former Prime Minister Robert Borden. Creighton's obituary lists his recreations as “exploration, salmon fishing, angling and skating.” There is no mention of hockey. The guy who formed the sport, and might have even been the one who directly created the Stanley Cup- has no mention of hockey in his obituary. Is that not strange? Some have suggested that he lived as a very “modest man who didn't want the fame or publicity.” Maybe. But there might also be something more going on with this story.

His Beechwood Cemetery grave had been unmarked until *The Society for*

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19 [www.helencreighton.org](http://www.helencreighton.org) Creighton Folk “Alliance Lifetime Achievement Award Winner 2017” video, and Wikipedia page on Helen Creighton

20 [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Donald\\_Creighton](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Donald_Creighton)

*International Hockey Research* had it marked in 2009. The explanation for a lack of a monument had been because he and his wife Eleanor had no children. Maybe? I have been to many cemeteries in my life and seen many grave sites marked for people who died without children. He worked as a high official for the Canadian Parliament, had a former Prime Minister at his funeral, was close friends with at least one Governor-General, was a member of the most elite clubs in Ottawa, a city where he had been an excellent community member for 48 years, and buried in the elite cemetery of not just the city but the entire country, and no one "marked" his grave? Trust me, something is very odd about this; as will be the case for another hockey founder, James Stewart of the Montreal AAA, who will also be later buried in an unmarked grave in Seattle.

I hope you will start to see that James Creighton was not just some Halifax shinny player who wanted to keep the McGill rugby team fit in the off season as has long been presented. I think that is what many in the early years wanted people to believe. We saw that not only was he a writer, but likely the very one doing the writing in the newspaper for the early games. He could have thus been an organizer, player and promoter all in one package. I will show he may have also been a cog in a much larger system started in the early 1840s, after the Rebellions of 1837 and 1838. The cog being to tie Native Aboriginal and French Canadian culture together, and then "British them up" by adding organization and structure in order to create something seemingly new. An "invention." It is my suspicion that he was just a "front man" for a much bigger story going on behind the scenes.

Canada was a new nation after 1867 and needed in a sense to build itself a national identity and psyche. A big part of this building process was through sports. What we have come to think of today and define as "Canada" and "hockey" was purposely being constructed in the period 1850-1890. As such, the sport of hockey did not evolve from British pastimes (the usual suggestion), nor was it some type of accident. It was likely a planned operation. The question becomes, if so, who planned it, and why? If I had to guess, I would say that Sandford Fleming might have been the key to it all, and his connection will be looked into deeply in chapter nine.

But we have to take a step back, and look prior to Canada's formation as a country in 1867. Not to early newspaper reports about stick-and-ball games on ice (that is what most would expect in my book now). No, actually we have to investigate some Montreal elite clubs - particularly the Snow Shoe and Lacrosse Clubs, which were part of a template which would also be used on hockey in the 1870s. And the historical political unrest of the period, which was a main fuel for the entire operation.

**SNOWSHOES, LACROSSE, and HOCKEY**  
***Montreal's Plan***

*"Moreover it is suggested that the snowshoe and lacrosse clubs created a 'myth of origin' which linked members back to 'their' history in Canada, but in the process, effectively erased the histories of real Canadian Natives."*<sup>21</sup>  
 (Gillian Poulter)

*"The earliest clubs were constituted to provide social outings for the Anglophone elite in the community rather than opportunities to demonstrate physical skills in a competitive situation."*<sup>22</sup> (Alan Metcalfe)

There were several problems for the British colonial elite in Montreal at the beginning of the 1870s, but three stand out. First, Montreal was for all intents and purposes, the capital of Canada. Yes, the actual capital had just been made Ottawa, but Montreal was still the home of all big business. Therefore, the home of the elite. The problem is that all of those elites were from England, and even if their children were born in Canada, they still looked, dressed and talked as if they were in Edinburgh or London. They did not "fit in" with the local populations of either the First Nations People or the French Francophones. Most of the regular workers in Montreal were Francophones, and they resented that the new British conquerors were their bosses. Actually, those sentiments would still exist almost a hundred years later in what became the Richard Riot of 1955. This chapter is now a discussion about the Victorian elite of Montreal in the 1870s, and the constant threat of revolution against them. This is a very important chapter for understanding the hows and whys behind the elite's creation of the sport of hockey. I am just giving an overview of rather complex historical events. If you have an interest, I would recommend you look deeper into the situation around the Canadian rebellions of 1837 and 1838, and read Gillian Poulter's excellent book *Becoming Native in a Foreign Land*.

A second problem was that Canada had just become a new country in 1867, and thus the previous garrison of British soldiers had gone back to England. Canada was now in charge of its own army, and preparing the country for the always-possible invasion from the United States. Canada had been invaded three times in the last

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<sup>21</sup> Gillian Poulter, *Becoming Native* pg 5

<sup>22</sup> Alan Metcalfe, "Organized Sport"



hundred years. A question was being asked in very high circles of how to get the young Canadian male population ready to be soldiers. Thirdly, a new country needed a new national identity- one that was unique and not American, nor British. Sports would become a key step in attempting to solve these three problems.

Gillian Poulter claims that “the British colonists 'improved' Native skills by imposing their own notions of science and order upon them. Therefore, these skills were transformed into uniquely new organized sports, governed by rules, which ensured discipline and 'fair play.' This intervention justified the colonists' claim to have invented the sports, and legitimized their claim to be native Canadians.”<sup>23</sup> Snowshoeing was the first attempt at appropriation, setting up the club system. Next came lacrosse, which laid out the groundwork that would be later followed by hockey. In many ways, there are great similarities between George Beers (father of lacrosse) and James Creighton (father of hockey).

This ideology can be traced back to around 1840 when Lord Durham took over as the new Governor-General following the huge rebellions of 1837 and 1838. The rebellions took place in both Upper and Lower Canada, the original names of Ontario and Quebec, as the population was demanding political reform. Some historians have speculated that the rebellion's ideology was similar with those that had started both the American and French Revolutions. Without going into great detail, the people wanted much more input in the decisions governments would make on their behalf, and a call for equal rights. The lower classes felt they were not getting any acknowledgment, from the heads of state or from the local political leaders (mayors and town administrators) who were linked to the elites and who were controlling them behind the scenes. All this while a recession swept the country, hitting farmers the hardest, who were also dealing with nation-wide crop failures in 1836, and were being hounded from lawsuits from merchants trying to