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**“She must not stir out of a darkened room”<sup>1</sup>:  
The Redpath Mansion Mystery**

*Résumé*

*Cet article relate la vie privée dans une éminente maison bourgeoise de l'âge d'or de Montréal, telle qu'elle s'est révélée sous l'éclairage brutal de la publicité occasionnée par une violente fusillade. Nous y montrons comment les morts tragiques d'une mère et de son fils ont renforcé de fragiles connexions de classe entre la propriété et la richesse, les relations familiales et l'image de la famille. En se basant sur des journaux intimes, des photographies et des articles de journaux, ainsi que sur des romans et des poésies publiés, nous avançons l'idée que la famille exposait l'architecture, autant les espaces de son propre foyer que l'architecture monumentale publique de la ville, pour se plier aux diktats d'un impératif paradoxal : l'intimité devait être ouvertement montrée, les problèmes familiaux privés joués dans des rituels publics. Les survivants de la famille ont rapidement entamé une série de manœuvres pour réduire au secret l'évènement public et pour réinscrire les personnes décédées au sein de normes de classe, de décorum et de conduite. Nous avançons que la maison elle-même, en tant qu'objet matériel, est présente dans le jeu complexe des relations sociales interconnectées, des comportements et des récits qui produisent la respectabilité bourgeoise.*

*Abstract*

*This paper accounts for private life in a prominent Gilded-Age Montreal bourgeois household as revealed in the sudden glare of publicity generated by a violent double shooting. We show how the tragic deaths of a mother and her son re-enforced fragile class connections between propriety and wealth, family relations and family image. Drawing on diaries, photographs and newspaper accounts, as well as published novels and poetry, we argue that the family deployed architecture, both the spaces of its own home and public monumental architecture in the city, to follow the dictates of a paradoxical imperative: intimacy had to be openly displayed, family private matters enacted in public rituals. The surviving family quickly began a series of manoeuvres designed to make secret the public event, and re-inscribe the deaths within class norms of decorum and conduct. The house itself, we claim, as a material object, figures in the complex interplay of inter-connected social relationships, behaviours and narratives that produce bourgeois respectability.*

The bourgeois urban home has had a pivotal role in the history of the modern household in North America, from the mid-18th century until the explosion of automobile-dependent suburbia after the Second World War. At once cynosures and enclaves, the mansions of the rich followed the dictates of a paradoxical imperative: intimacy had to be openly displayed, private family matters enacted in public rituals. The issue is not merely that domestic concerns could be publicized—although as we shall see, that could happen in scandalous fashion—but rather that for the upper class, publicity itself needed to be simultaneously courted and disavowed. Literary theorists Karen Chase and Michael Levenson have suggested that anxiety about intimacy becoming spectacle increased during the latter 19th century when the rise of sensation novels and journalism exposed private matters to the “furious public churning” (2000: 7) of the masses. Conversely, Pamela Gilbert argues that as a mark of respectability, Victorian domestic privacy had to be displayed, open to inspection, “the visible representation of having nothing to hide” (2007: 67), which suggests that private domesticity was compelled toward acts of exposure and display.

At the turn of the 20th century, Canada’s wealthiest families lived in a neighbourhood known as the Square Mile. A short carriage ride up the mountain from central Montreal, this was an intimate and closed community of its own making.<sup>2</sup> Life in the Square Mile was captured in William Notman’s photographs, Stephen Leacock’s satirical sketches, and the pages of local newspapers that celebrated Montreal’s “merchant princes” and “captains of industry.” But the families’ grandeur was also on display in their sumptuous homes, mansions that helped present a carefully scripted, opulent and sanitized public portrait of their world.<sup>3</sup> How, then, did class norms and architecture shape their behaviour? What was the effect of unscripted, un-condoned action on the stability of bourgeois domesticity and decorum? In particular, how did violence pressure the fragile connections between propriety and wealth, family relations and family image? What role did domestic architecture itself—the house as a material object—figure in the interplay of inter-connected social relationships and behaviours?

In this paper, we explore one particular moment of violence: the sudden and unexplained June 13th, 1901, deaths by gunshot of Ada and Clifford Redpath, two members of one of Canada’s wealthiest families. The Redpath Mansion Mystery,

a website we developed showcasing the Redpath tragedy for Great Unsolved Mysteries in Canadian History, like other mysteries featured in the award-winning project, is intended to teach students how to interpret historical evidence using a real-life mystery.<sup>4</sup> As researchers, our job was thus to collect and present the primary-source texts and images associated with the mystery, not to solve it. In this paper we turn to analysis. Our challenge is still not to solve the mystery—that is likely impossible given the lack of reliable evidence—but rather to ponder how social class reinforces certain expected behaviours associated with bourgeois respectability. In particular, we are interested in the deportment of Amy Redpath, daughter of Ada and sister to Clifford, whose post-murder behaviour controlled access to the event and the information, invoking silence and publicly treating the deaths (funeral and burial) as if they were *not* a consequence of violence. The Redpath mansion, we contend, was a powerful tool of Amy Redpath’s control.

This paper studies a family managing image by manipulating material culture, including both private domestic architecture and public monumental architecture. As sites of bourgeois culture, personal diaries and private correspondence also begged editing; and, were either conserved or expunged to safeguard the family’s public face. The crux of the Redpath mystery lies in the tension between multiple compulsions, a veritable profusion of competing discourses that explodes the simple notion of private anguish made public. The episode shines a light on family loyalty and tensions, public appearances and private suffering, domestic space and public monuments. Architecture here has a privileged place that reveals the private lives of the super wealthy and their servants in turn-of-the-century Montreal. The outward signs of rich households, architecture, decoration, neighbourhood, for example, announced prosperity and also served as sites for the social affirmation of privacy. The mansion of the industrialist, rather than a private domestic realm, is in this instance simultaneously the site of public life—especially for women and for the ill who do not participate in civic or business affairs—of public performances, of familial and class identity.

## The Mystery

Scant facts surround the Redpath mystery. Ada Maria Mills Redpath, the fifty-nine-year-old widow of industrialist John James Redpath, and her

twenty-four-year-old son Jocelyn Clifford Redpath were shot in Ada's bedroom in the family's mansion in Montreal's affluent Square Mile district. Peter Whiteford Redpath (Clifford's older brother) was in the house at the time of the tragedy. From the coroner's report Peter is quoted as saying:

I saw my brother the deceased arriving home at around six o'clock; he seemed ill and was tired. ... He went up to the room of my mother ... a few seconds later I heard a shot from a firearm, followed by two others. I ran up and broke down the door. I saw my mother lying on the floor and several feet from her my brother, also lying in a pool of blood, a revolver a foot away from him near his hand. (BANQ: Cour du Coroner, Ada Maria Mills Redpath, June 14, 1901)

A coroner's inquest was convened at the Redpath mansion the day following the shocking deaths. Thirteen of Montreal's leading citizens heard the above testimony from Peter Redpath, as well as statements from several leading Montreal physicians, Rose Shallow, a household servant, and Charles Fleet, prominent businessman and relative to the Redpaths through marriage. Their testimony affirmed that Ada had been shot in the back of the head and Clifford in the left temple. One doctor noted there was foam in Clifford's mouth, sign of a recent epileptic attack. In the official opinion of Dr. Thomas Roddick, the Redpaths' family physician: "the son must have killed his mother and then shot himself afterward. ... The son is epileptic and not responsible for his acts before, during and after his attacks" (ibid.). The jury agreed with Roddick in its official statement: Ada died from a gunshot wound inflicted by Clifford, who then took his own life "while unconscious of what he was doing and temporarily insane, owing to an epileptic attack from which he was suffering at the time" (ibid.).

This was the official record, but it is far from the whole story. The Redpath mystery is defined by secrets and contradictions barely legible today in a trail of material and textual clues. If the coroner's inquest solved the mystery, why are there no suicides on record in the City of Montreal for June 1901? Why is there no mention in family documents of Clifford's "epilepsy" before the shootings, especially in Amy Redpath's extensive diaries? Is Peter's testimony trustworthy? And where was Amy at the time of the shootings? Still, the coroner's report is the only official record of the double shooting. Both bodies were buried within forty-eight hours and no further investigation took place. Amazingly by today's standards, no police officer was ever called.

Therefore, it is unlikely that we will ever know with certainty "whodunit," the trail of clues having long since run cold. But the Redpath Mansion Mystery opens other doors. The Redpath home was both the scene of the crime and the family's refuge, a site of tragedy and of solace. As a leading Montreal family, the Redpaths enacted the Victorian values of home, family and seclusion, a lifestyle that relied heavily on the careful negotiation of public and private spaces.

## **Private Architecture: The Redpath Mansion**

The Redpaths were prominent members of the Anglo-Protestant elite whose ascent to wealth and power has had an important place in Canadian economic and social history.<sup>5</sup> The Redpaths had set down roots in British North America in 1816 when family patriarch, John Redpath, immigrated to Montreal from Scotland at the age of twenty, following an apprenticeship with master stonemason George Drummond of Edinburgh. Men like John Redpath belonged to what historian Brian Young calls the "first generations in Canada [who] were "making history": building, accumulating, reproducing, serving" (2000: 16).<sup>6</sup> Redpath quickly made a fortune in construction, having secured contracts to build huge projects like the Lachine and Rideau canals and Notre Dame Church, in addition to public and commercial buildings such as the British and Canadian School, the Bank of Montreal, and the Theatre Royal. He enlarged his wealth by investing in real estate.<sup>7</sup> Blood and marital ties ensured that his family maintained control over its wealth, power and status.<sup>8</sup> In 1836, an already wealthy Redpath purchased 235 acres of land on the slopes of Mount Royal from the Desrivieres family. He built a mansion for his rapidly expanding family on a property Redpath renamed Terrace Bank; he sub-divided and sold the remaining acreage which comprised a significant proportion of the Square Mile, the Mount Royal Park and a section of the Mount Royal Cemetery. Ever alert to new business opportunities, Redpath used profits derived from this real estate venture to establish Canada's first sugar refinery in 1854.

Family bonds served as a source of economic and emotional support, reinforced kin relations through the rituals of god-parenting and marriage, and encouraged similar family-initiated strategies. Relatives lived in close proximity to each other, died

at home in the presence of family members rather than in hospital, and were buried in ancestral plots.

At the time of the 1901 tragedy, victim Ada Mills Redpath, who was the youngest daughter of Montreal Mayor John Easton Mills and Hannah

Lyman, had already been a widow for seventeen years. She had married John James Redpath, the youngest child of John Redpath and first wife Janet McPhee, in 1867 at Putney near London, England. John James worked for a time in the family sugar refinery. In 1860, he became a partner in the firm but left the refinery eight years later to pursue a career as an officer in the Victoria Rifles. He died on June 4, 1884, of “paralysis” and was buried in the Redpath family plot at the Mount Royal Cemetery (formerly Redpath land), a long-favoured burial venue for Montreal’s elite (Young 2003: 16). The Redpaths had five children (Fig. 1): Amy, Peter, John Reginald, Harold and Jocelyn Clifford, born between 1868 and 1876.

Ada Redpath’s marriage contract stipulated that she would control her own assets as if no marriage had taken place.<sup>9</sup> In November 1870, it was Ada who purchased the family villa (Fig. 2). Unfortunately it was demolished in 1956, which means we must rely on photographs and descriptions for information on the design of the building.<sup>10</sup> Designed by architect John James Browne, the residence at 1065 Sherbrooke Street West, corner of Redpath Street, was by the time of the tragedy surrounded by mature trees and an ornamental lawn. Like many of the city’s residences, the house was constructed of limestone (known locally as *pierre grise* or “greystone”). Two storeys, plus an attic and a basement, the house had a five-bay, symmetrical structure, marked by a particularly handsome raised entry with classical columns. The mansard roof, on the building’s third floor, had three dormer windows, capped by semi-circular and triangular (central) pediments. The approach to the house was choreographed by the architect through a gentle, circular driveway from Sherbrooke Street, anticipating arrival by carriage. Even the crescent-shaped lawn framed by the driveway included stairs, presumably for visitors arriving on foot. Archival photographs of the house emphasize its severity and symmetry, offset by a proliferation of vines and the lush growth of surrounding trees in the summer time. In 1870, Browne also designed the home of the Redpaths’ immediate neighbours to the north, the David Morrice family, and it is likely that the houses were quite similar in style and layout. Other neighbours were related by blood, as the house was one of about a dozen Redpath houses occupying a vast plot of land stretching from Sherbrooke Street to present-day Dr. Penfield Avenue.

**Fig. 1**

*The five Redpath children enjoyed a comfortable lifestyle in their Square Mile mansion. Mrs. J. J. Redpath's Group, Montreal, QC, 1881, Notman & Sandham, Musée McCord Museum, II-59824.1.*



**Fig. 2**

*The Redpath mansion was typical of upper-class architecture in Montreal’s affluent Square Mile. Mrs. John Redpath’s House, Sherbrooke Street, Montreal, QC, 1899. Wm. Notman & Son, Musée McCord Museum, II-129781.*

The Redpath house would have appeared large to passersby, a feature emphasized in period photos of the house. The slight incline of the site gave the house a looming presence from Sherbrooke Street, as did the setback of approximately seven metres from the busy road. As architectural historian Dell Upton has shown in his multiple studies of American plantation houses, a measure of social class in residential design is the number of steps or filters visitors navigate from the street to a home's interior. "Each barrier served to reinforce the impression of [the plantation owner's] centrality, and each, in addition, affirmed the visitor's status as he or she passed through it," Upton writes of Mount Airy in Virginia (1984: 66). In the case of 1065 Sherbrooke, these filters included the curved driveway, entrance stairs and entry porch.

Once within a home like the Redpaths', visitors would experience even more filters. They would be welcomed into a rather intimate vestibule, leading to a central entrance hall, from which the public rooms—in this case likely parlour and dining room—would be found. Since there are no extant plans of the Redpath house, we can only speculate about the presence of a second parlour or a library, rooms commonly found in buildings of this type. At the back of the house would have been a separate entrance for servants, the kitchen and likely stairs to the basement. From interviews with relatives who visited the house as children, we know that the servant rooms were in the lower level of the Redpath house.

The plans of late 19th-century urban mansions in North America were well-crafted instruments of separation and order. Family propriety was kept in check by a central circulation system, generous corridors separating rooms and leading to wide staircases with landings, ensuring that no accidental meetings could occur. Moving from the dining room to the parlour, for example, as ladies were expected to do following dinner, meant crossing from a purpose-built room for eating, into a space for circulation, and then to one for conversation and display. The boundaries of rooms and their discreet functions were in this way clearly understood and never overlapped or blurred. Room use was also strictly organized by gender, social class and age. Adult family members would meet and entertain visitors in the public rooms at the front of the house; visitors would never want or expect to see the kitchen, pantry or upstairs bedrooms. Children played and often ate in purpose-built nurseries on

an upper floor; they were the only family members who might ever occupy spaces intended for servants (for example, to eat). Otherwise, servant spaces were strictly for servants. Kitchens and laundries, the centres of servant labour, might also be the sites where the mistresses of the house—in this case both Ada and Amy Redpath—would manage household affairs and oversee the work of the staff. Servants entered from the rear of the house and also had an independent system of circulation, including hallways and staircases.

## Public Architecture

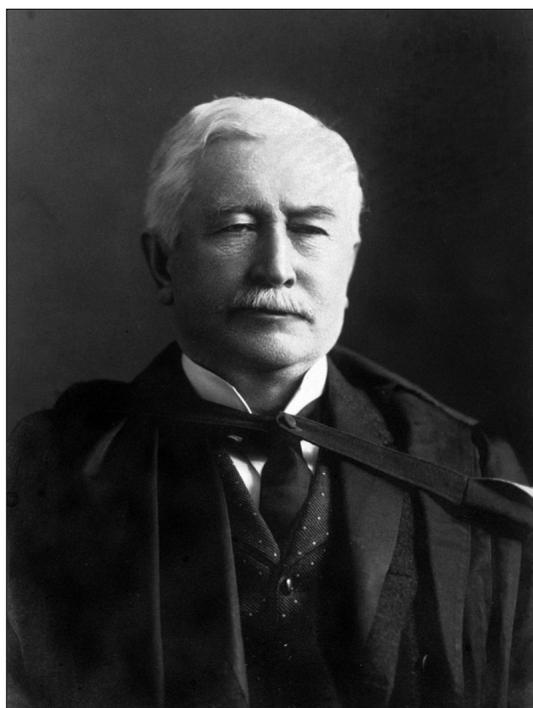
The counterpart to this finely structured domestic realm was the array of public and commercial institutions of a rapidly growing city. Like wealthy families today, the Redpath family endowed monumental public architecture in Montreal, extending their favour and influence beyond the domestic realm. Their familiarity and access to the city's well-known architects was an aspect of their elite status. Two significant buildings at McGill University (the Redpath Library and the Redpath Museum), bear the family name, and were constructed in the decades before the tragedy, reinforcing the family's public reputation and ensuring its place in public memory.<sup>11</sup> McGill University's Redpath Library, designed by Andrew Taylor (who was related to the Redpaths by marriage), opened in 1893 as a gift from Peter and Grace Redpath, Clifford's uncle and aunt. Scottish-born Andrew Taylor designed some of the university's best-known buildings, such as the Old Macdonald Engineering Building, the Macdonald-Harrington Building, and the Macdonald Physics Building. In their juxtaposition of greystone walls and copper roofs, Taylor's buildings defined a recognizable McGill style that is still highly legible. Other outstanding Montreal buildings by Taylor's firm include the Montreal Theological College and several branches of the Bank of Montreal.

Today, Taylor's heavily renovated Redpath Library functions only as a ceremonial hall for McGill University, although a modern library building still bears the Redpath name. Nearby Redpath Museum, however, is still a natural sciences museum. Described as the first purpose-built museum in Canada, the Redpath Museum was designed by Montreal architects Hutchison and Steele in 1882. Like Taylor, Alexander Hutchison's work has come to define McGill University's architectural charac-

**Fig. 3**  
*Amy Redpath Roddick commissioned the Roddick Gates in memory of her husband who had been Dean of Medicine at McGill University. Postcard of Roddick Gates, McGill University, Collection Annmarie Adams.*



**Fig. 4**  
*Thomas Roddick, the family physician, married Amy Redpath five years after the tragedy, as photographed by William Notman & Son, n.d. McGill University Archives, PL007843.*



ter. Heritage architect Julia Gersovitz speculates that the fine detailing on his work was inspired by his earlier experiences supervising the cut-stone work on Christ Church Cathedral and the East Block of the Parliament Buildings in Ottawa (Gersovitz n.d.). Peter Redpath's choice of Hutchison for the museum bearing his family's name shows his

awareness of avant-garde architecture in Canada at this time, as well as an appreciation of exquisite craftsmanship.

A third structure at McGill University endowed by the Redpaths, the Roddick Gates (Fig. 3), was constructed after the tragedy, and is part of the story of Amy's material control of the family legacy. Five years after gunshots killed her mother and brother, Amy Redpath married one of the other central figures in the drama, Dr. Thomas Roddick (Fig. 4), at her aunt and uncle's home in England where she had previously gone to recover following the shootings. Roddick had also been Ada's physician and had made frequent house calls to the family home on Sherbrooke Street to attend to her diverse ailments. Amy and her husband occupied the Redpath mansion for the rest of their lives. A surgeon, Roddick is best known for popularizing Lister's antiseptic's technique in Canada, and from 1901—the year of the tragedy—to 1908, as a highly effective Dean of Medicine at McGill University. He was knighted in 1914 and died in 1923. Amy Redpath Roddick commissioned architect Gratton Thompson to design the gates in 1924 as a memorial to her late husband. The story goes that Dr. Roddick was extremely punctual, so Amy included clocks on the gate.<sup>12</sup>

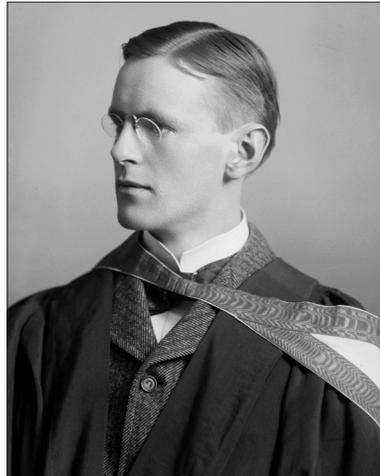
Amy was also a benefactor of the university library. At her death in 1954 she bequeathed \$120,000 to the library, remembered by a special memorial

bookplate bearing the names of her brothers Peter and Clifford. Along with the Roddick gates, these are strangely antiseptic memorials to her so-called murderous brother, with no direct invocation of Clifford's violent death. They show no dedication to her mother and instead associate Clifford's death with their sickly brother, who eventually succumbed to tuberculosis. Likewise, she wrote two privately published poems—one for Clifford, the other for Peter—held in the Rare Books and Special Collections at McGill (QMMRBSC: Amy Redpath Roddick, "Perfect in thy Promise—To J.C.R.," n.d. and Amy Redpath Roddick, "Ode: Because He Lived," ca. 1920).

### Clifford's Life in the Mansion

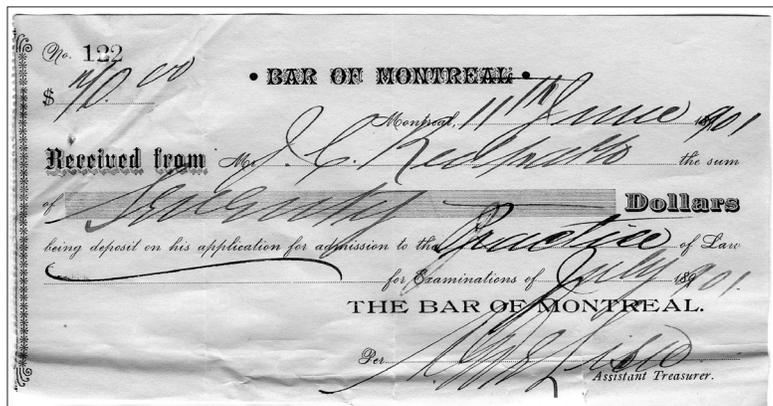
Amy Roddick's memorial bookplate and poems are important samples from the broad range of artifacts through which the family controlled its public image. The list also includes revolvers, domestic furnishings and photographs. Still, the buildings are crucial. Square Mile architecture, both the mansion and the monuments, constitutes the frame or setting, or better yet, the "lived landscape" that links the Redpath family with the larger community (Upton 2008: 15). As historian Roderick MacLeod argues, the buildings "marked these families in the public imagination" (1997: 192). But buildings also mark their inhabitants. We then now turn to the loose but binding fit between how the family lived and the environment they built.

If Clifford killed his mother before taking his own life on June 13, as the coroner's inquest decided, several aspects of family life in the Redpath mansion would help explain his motivation. At the time of the tragedy, Clifford (Fig. 5) was the only son living at home; brothers Reggie and Harold resided in Pincher Creek, North West Territories (later Alberta when it became a province in 1905) and Westmount, Quebec, respectively. The eldest brother, Peter, was seldom at home owing to illness. Peter appears to have been too unwell to work for any length of time after obtaining a science degree from McGill University. Like his mother, he too spent long periods away from home pursuing medical treatment in Europe for sciatica and taking the rest cure for tuberculosis in Ste-Agathe-des-Monts in the Laurentian Mountains of Quebec, upper New York State, Colorado and California. Following the shootings, Peter's health deteriorated rapidly prompting Amy to travel with him to Ste-Agathe-



**Fig. 5**  
Clifford Redpath graduated from McGill University in 1900. He was found dead a year later in his mother's bedroom. Mr. J. C. Redpath, Law graduate, Montreal, QC, 1900, Wm. Notman & Son, Musée McCord Museum, II-133577.

**Fig. 6**  
Clifford Redpath wrote a cheque for his bar examination, weakening the case of the young man's suicide. Receipt for bar examinations, June 11, 1901, Redpath Sugar Museum.



des-Monts and later to Redlands, California, where he died of tuberculosis May 18, 1902.

Clifford and Amy thus spent a great deal of time together and were apparently close, despite their age difference of eight years. They often took walks on Mount Royal and attended social activities as well as church together. Clifford was responsible for managing the family fortune albeit with the advice of brother Peter and his uncles. Described as devoted and attentive to his mother Ada, as an adult Clifford travelled with her to upper New York State in the summer, kept her company, read to her during flare-ups of ill health, and oversaw her care whenever sister Amy was absent from the house. Presumably this was a tremendous responsibility for him while studying for his bar exams, witnessing first hand his mother's declining health and possibly feeling burdened by his mother's expectations of and dependence upon him. While Amy did manage to travel to Europe and to upper New York State on her own or to accompany Peter while he sought treatment for tuberculosis, it was Clifford who took responsibility for Ada's care when Amy was away.

But there are also clues that Clifford was not overburdened. Only days before his death, he had submitted an application to write the bar examination accompanied by a cheque for \$70 (Fig. 6); this act weakens the argument that he planned to commit suicide. As we have seen by the city's suicide count,



**Fig. 7**  
*Amy Redpath devoted much time to taking care of their sickly mother. Miss Redpath, Montreal, QC, 1891, Wm. Notman & Son, Musée McCord Museum, II-96487.1.*

**Fig. 8**  
*This bedroom in the Morrice house, next door to the Redpath mansion, was likely similar to the bedroom of Ada Redpath, where the tragedy occurred. Mrs. David Morrice's bedroom, Montreal, QC, 1899, Wm. Notman & Son, Musée McCord Museum, II-128254.*



official records of the Redpath tragedy sanitize the deaths. In the Redpaths' social milieu, the violence of the events is likewise cleansed. The coroner's inquest held Clifford legally responsible for matricide and suicide. Yet mother and son received a High Anglican funeral at St. John the Evangelist Church, even though it was against Anglican doctrine to pay tribute to anyone who had committed suicide or homicide.<sup>13</sup> We speculate that Amy's stature in the parish allowed her to control the family's reputation, overcoming the stigma of violence. The material markers of this control are Clifford and Ada's tombstones at the family burial plot in Mount Royal Cemetery.

### Amy's Households

Understanding Amy's mediating role in the Redpath household is vital to an investigation of the mystery of the double crime. As the only daughter of Ada and John James, Amy (Fig. 7) took on the role of matriarch, managing the household and tending to her mother's and siblings' ailments and needs. Daughters were expected to postpone marriage to take care of sickly, widowed mothers and younger, unmarried siblings who still lived at home.<sup>14</sup> Amy accepted these household responsibilities earnestly; and she did not marry until five years after the tragedy when she was thirty-eight years old.<sup>15</sup> Amy hired and managed the domestic staff, paid the bills, organized repairs, renovations and spring cleaning, and did almost all of the family shopping. She accomplished these tasks with the critical assistance of household staff that included the live-in servants, a handyman, gardener, char woman, sewing girl and nurse as required by her mother Ada, a chronic invalid.

Everyday life in the Redpath household at 1065 Sherbrooke understandably revolved around health problems. Ada's bedroom, the scene of her eventual death, was increasingly also the setting for her daily life. In addition to supervising the home, Amy accompanied her mother to medical and dental appointments and kept vigil at Ada's bedside during particularly difficult days and nights. Ada had a long history of ill health and spent extended periods away from her children when they were growing up. While it is unclear with what specific disease Ada was afflicted, she suffered from a litany of ailments that included ulceration of the eyes, neuralgia of the jaw, painful joints and melancholia. In the years leading up to the tragedy, Ada's health worsened, further necessitating summers and

autumns passed in upper New York sanatoriums. By 1899, Ada still entertained occasionally, took rides around the mountain, shopped and visited family members. Even so, daughter Amy had noted at the beginning of 1898 that her mother was not as well as usual and that “life is really a burden to her” (QMMRBSC: MS 659 Sir Thomas Roddick, Amy Redpath, Diary #4, 1898, Amy Redpath Roddick, Wednesday January 5, 1898.). In the year preceding the tragedy, Ada seldom left her bedroom (Fig. 8) and was unable to attend family functions and celebrations.

It would not have been easy for Amy to deal daily with Ada’s deteriorating ill health over such a long period. Amy’s reference to and description of Ada’s life as “a burden,” provides a key piece of evidence supporting the theory that Ada ended her own life on June 13. Amy’s dedication to her ailing, demanding mother notwithstanding, she spent time away from home in pursuit of leisure activities, shopping and attending lectures. Letters and diary entries reveal that Ada vacillated between self-reproach and guilt-inducing behaviour. For example, Ada sent a postcard to her family wherein she tried to assure her family that her health had improved owing to a change in her emotional state: “I have written such a stupid letter but hope to write soon again. I think my eyes are stronger. You are so good about asking, and I am less nervous & less bothered than I was. I have much to be thankful for!! & I try to grow calm & serene!” (PAALR). Yet, in August 1898, Amy was compelled by Ada’s behaviour to accompany her and Peter to Dr. Strong’s Sanatorium in the Adirondacks:

At ten went to the station to see Mama & Peter off – M clung to me, feeling too ill to be left so there & then I made up my mind to go with her. I don’t think anyone ever went to Saratoga with so few impediments before, not even a pair of gloves. (QMMRBSC: MS 659, Roddick, Sir Thomas – Amy Redpath, Diary #4, 1898, August 11, 1898)

In a letter dated the following day—August 12, 1898—Ada reminded Clifford of her expectations of her youngest child and her continued reliance on him: “Oh, how I miss you! I have come so dependent on you that I am lost without you. Nothing seems worthwhile without you,” she wrote (PAALR). It would have been difficult for Amy and Clifford to distance themselves from Ada’s complaints, especially when the household activity revolved around nursing Ada in her bedroom.

## Narrative Contradictions

In the absence of standard historical evidence, we turn to narrative genres that provide different, but no less important, textual linguistic clues about this mystery. Significant supplements to material culture sources themselves are the stories told about the built environment. The observers of the tragedy were more apt to describe the events than to dissect them.<sup>16</sup> Apart from the official inquiry, newspaper reports comprise the richest source of information about the double shooting. The Redpath tragedy was fodder for Canada’s burgeoning daily press; news of the tragedy travelled far and wide, commanding attention from the press across Canada, and even making the front page of *The New York Times*. The French-language *La Presse*, with its reputation for sensationalism, set the affair in the context of “Drame sanglant dans ‘le high-life’” of Montreal’s wealthy English-speaking élite:

Mr. Redpath [Clifford] had overtaxed himself to such an extent that he fell ill of a nervous affection. It appears that he was in a state of severe mental depression. ... At around 5 o’clock, he fired several shots with a revolver, killing his mother instantly and fatally wounding himself.<sup>17</sup>

The same day, under the headline, “Mother and Son Death” the (Toronto) *Globe* reported that: “Mrs. Redpath had a revolver in her hand, perhaps with suicidal intent, and ... her son in trying to take it from her was accidentally shot, and that his mother then carried out her intention.”<sup>18</sup>

The deaths of Ada and Clifford may have inspired fiction as well. Three years after the event, Amy’s cousin, Lily Dougall,<sup>19</sup> published a particularly compelling novel titled *The Summit House Mystery* or *The Earthly Purgatory* (Dougall 1905). In this *roman à clef*, two sisters seek anonymity and take refuge from public opinion in a house on the summit of Deer Mountain in the Deep South after one of them is suspected of involvement in the horrific double murder of their father and stepmother in New York. The sisters’ home atop the mountain mediates the memory of that crime, its thick walls serving neither to permit details to escape nor unsanctioned inquiries to be made. The importance of maintaining a respectable public life consumes the sisters who believe their secret will not be revealed if they keep it entirely to themselves. Their lawyer and only remaining contact in New York contributes by sending blank correspondence through the mail to populate their social life with fake acquaintances. The sisters’ house and lifestyle

exude a veneer of proper domesticity to outsiders, while their private lives are marked by suffering, loss and fear of social condemnation.

Dougall visited Peter and Amy Redpath almost daily in the months following Clifford and Ada's deaths and her insights provide a compelling interpretation of the tragedy wherein the idea of "home" was paramount to a strategy of discourse and public ritual which was ultimately successful in submerging the truth about family violence. For both the Redpaths and Dougall's fictional Claxton family, the physical structure of the house—its thick walls, intimidating scale and its general aura of exclusivity—limited access to the family and information about the crimes, and its status as a private dwelling seems to have taken on increased significance during the period following the tragedy.

Finally, literary evidence suggests that Amy carefully censored potentially embarrassing or compromising details of the tragedy. Although a poet, playwright, diarist and correspondent, she left no written trace of the deaths of her brother and mother. In an August 24, 1901, letter written two months after the tragedy to her sister-in-law Alice (no surname included), Amy stated: "I spent yesterday sorting and tearing up old letters, – rather a mournful business" (PAALR). Amy worked hard to keep the details of the tragedy private, but her work as a playwright belies a compulsion to express her thoughts through fiction. Amy wrote plays that belong to a genre known as "closet-drama": they were performed privately or perhaps never

performed at all. According to present-day family members, the Redpath family never spoke publicly about the tragedy; so like a closet drama, their story was never recounted in public. In an interpretation of Amy's closet drama—*An Old Bologna Tale*—theatre historian Kym Bird (2008) suggests that this tale of the absolution of a child murderer by the murdered child's mother resolved real psychological contradictions in Amy's own tragic past.

Bird points to Amy's lifelong relationship with Mary Rose Shallow (Fig. 9), a servant at the time of the tragedy, and a companion when Rose died in 1943, as an example of Amy's "closeted" life. Born in Newfoundland, Rose never married, choosing instead to remain in service with Amy Redpath, accompanying her mistress to Europe even for her wedding and honeymoon, as well as to the United States, the Caribbean and Africa. Bird argues that Amy and Rose had a romantic relationship and describes Amy Redpath as "the first identifiably lesbian playwright in Canada." She also links the closet drama genre to the "closeted nature of the love-relationship that inspires so much of Roddick's writing" (Bird 2008). That Amy remembered Rose as well as Rose's sister Margaret (who had joined the Redpaths' household staff as housekeeper) in her 1925 will is at the very least evidence of a relationship beyond that customarily associated with household staff and mistress. She bequeathed a yearly income of \$1200 and all of her clothes to Rose; to Margaret she willed \$600 per annum.<sup>20</sup> As it turned out, Amy outlived Rose. Rose was 73 years old when she died April 11, 1943 at the Redpath family home on Sherbrooke Street. A funeral was held at St Patrick's Church and Rose was buried at the Notre-Dame-des-Neiges Cemetery. In the obituary, Rose was described as a "dearly beloved friend of Lady Roddick." The following year, Amy had Rose disinterred and reburied in the Redpath family plot at the Mount Royal Cemetery, a dramatic physical event and material gesture that attests to Amy's urge to stay close to Rose, even in death. The move was further commemorated on a plaque mounted on the Redpath monument, which stated, "Mary Rose Shallow 1870-1943 Beloved Companion of Lady Roddick."

## Conclusion

Amy Redpath left no rationale for her decision to continue living in the house where her brother and mother were shot. She certainly had the resources to

**Fig. 9**  
Amy Redpath was particularly close to her family's household servant, Mary Rose Shallow. They travelled together to Egypt and Rose also accompanied Amy on her honeymoon. Photograph courtesy Amy Linda Redpath.



live elsewhere; indeed all of her siblings and most of her extended family had left the Square Mile by the First World War. She was one of the last Square Mile denizens to remain as the area welcomed a new set of wealthy families whose former mansions are now used as embassies or belong to McGill University.<sup>21</sup> This new so-called Golden Square Mile would have been unrecognizable to Clifford and Ada. Amy's attachment to the house is thus a signal of its importance in our story: a private home whose publicness advertised respectability and concealed tragedy.

From within her mansion Amy successfully lived life as a "closet" drama as a help-mate to her ailing mother, in her complex relationship with her servant and long-time companion Rose, and as a benefactor to McGill University. In the rich archival legacy that her life generated, she recorded no reaction to the violence surrounding the deaths of her mother and youngest brother. Amy's diaries leave a faithful record of her social activities and calls, an invaluable window into Square Mile daily life. The record, however, contains remarkably little personal reflection or description concerning the tragic events of 1901, events that must have left an indelible scar on the young woman's psyche. Since she so carefully documented other events, we contend that she likewise carefully directed this silence. A reading of extant letters of condolence confirms that relatives and friends closed ranks around the grieving family members, by accentuating Clifford's virtue and disregarding his role in the tragedy. There are relatively few references to Ada's death. Ellen Plimsoll's description of Clifford in her sympathy letter to Amy is typical:

It haunted me, and dwelt with me, and I grieve for your dear brother for whom I chose lilies as being emblematic of the purity of his life and character. A sweeter smile than his I never saw – very, very few young men have had so high an ideal in life and I think, if I had been asked for a perfect type of life, I should have thought of him as a model. (QMMA: MS 818 c.1 Redpath Family, 1.1 Redpath Family

Collection, Sympathy Letters concerning June 13 1901 from Family Friends)

Perhaps inspired by anxiety about intimacy becoming spectacle, the general cultural disquietude Chase and Levenson have discussed, Amy took great pains to expurgate Clifford's reputation by giving a donation to the Redpath Library to commemorate his life and that of his brother Peter. She thus continued the family tradition of being a generous benefactor of McGill University, a pattern started by her uncle Peter Redpath and his wife Grace Woods. As mentioned, in 1924, Amy contributed the Roddick Gates to the institution; she also bequeathed \$120,000 to the library on her death in 1954. Such acts ensured that a public legacy of the family's own making was etched on the architecture and urban geography of the city.

The final act in Amy's closet drama regarding her family's tragic past was the demolition of 1065 Sherbrooke Street in 1956, two years after her death. Purchased for development by a British investment company, the Redpath house was open to the public for the first time. In preparation for an auction of the contents scheduled for June 16, 1954, a viewing of the family's furniture, art, silver and china was conducted on the premises. Newspaper articles emphasized the awe of the visitors as they toured the luxurious mansion filled with the material symbols of the Redpath's wealth. Especially impressive was Amy's bedroom, as noted in the article "Lady Roddick's Home To Go on Block Today."<sup>22</sup> It was reported that in the bedroom sat Joseph Hornayak, an employee for twenty-nine years, who pointed to the large brass bed and added, "Her die here in this bed." The house was demolished and is today the site of a non-descript high-rise apartment tower. With the complete destruction of the house and dispersal of its belongings, an all-important material link to the Redpath tragedy was destroyed; only the public legacy, the monumental architecture endures—a visible representation that Amy's family has, at last, no private acts left to hide and no private place left to hide them.

## Notes

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1. On May 9, 1897, Amy Redpath recorded this admonition in her diary (QMMRBSC: MS 659 Sir Thomas Roddick, Amy Redpath, Diary #3, 1897, Amy Redpath Roddick, Sunday 9 1897, May 9, 1897).
2. The Square Mile was bounded on the south and north of Dorchester Boulevard and the slope of Mount Royal, by Guy Street and Côte-des-Neiges on the west and Bleury Street and Parc Avenue to the east. According to Jean Claude Marsan, seventy per cent of Canada's wealth was in the

- hands of Square Mile residents (Marsan 1994: 250). See also MacLeod (1997).
3. See, for example, Westley (1990); MacKay (1987); Cameron (1976); Ballantyne (1956); Atherton (1914); Ames (1972 /1897); and Borthwick (1897).
  4. Created by a team of team of historians, archaeologists, educators and other specialists from across Canada, and based at the University of Victoria, the project is popular in both school and university classrooms, attracting up to 2200 visitors per day. Students from more than forty-five countries have analyzed the documents, maps and 3-D crime scene reconstructions. Mysteries range from unsolved historical murders to the actual location of the first Viking settlement on the East Coast. The year we launched our mystery, 2008, the project won a Merlot Classics Award, recognizing excellence in the web-based teaching materials for history. Please see [www.merlot.org](http://www.merlot.org) (accessed March 23, 2011).
  5. Richard Feltoe has published several books on the history of the patriarch (1991, 1993, 2004). He also curates the Redpath Sugar Museum in Toronto, Ontario. Peter McNally has written extensively about Peter Redpath's patronage at McGill University (1993: 69; 2003: 11-16).
  6. Although Young refers here to John McCord (2000: 16), his comment aptly fits the Redpath family.
  7. For more on the Redpath family, see MacLeod (2003), Linteau (1975, 2000, 2007) and Linteau et al. (1983).
  8. John Redpath fathered seventeen children. In 1818, he had married Janet McPhee, the daughter of a stonemason, and from this union, seven children were born: Elizabeth, Peter, Mary, Jane, Helen, Jane Margaret and John James. McPhee died of cholera in 1834. A year later, the thirty-nine year old Redpath wedded nineteen-year-old Jane Drummond who bore ten children: Margaret, George, Williamina, Isabella, Francis, Charles, Augusta, Emily, Harriet and William. Twelve of the seventeen children survived into adulthood and married into affluent families including the Drummonds, Fleets, Taylors, Boveys, Plimsolls, Dougalls, Dennistouns and Mills. While all of John Redpath's children enjoyed the wealth he had accrued, only some of them were involved in the family business: sons Peter, George and John James; brother-in-law George Drummond managed the sugar refinery.
  9. It was common in Quebec, as was the tendency in Great Britain, the United States, and the rest of Canada, for a bourgeois couple to go to a notary's office to have a marriage contract drawn up in order to keep each partner's property separate.
- Among other things, such an act protected a woman's property from her husband's creditors should financial problems arise (Bradbury et al. 1993). For more on bourgeois women who married irresponsible men, see Nootens (2005). Other publications include, Cliché (1995).
10. See "Lady Roddick's Home To Go On Block Today" in the June 16, 1954, issue of the *Montreal Daily Star*. Also see "Roddick House, Victorian Landmark On Sherbrooke St., to Disappear" in the March 14, 1956, issue of the *Montreal Daily Star*.
  11. Historian Brian Young has argued that the Montreal Anglo-Protestant bourgeoisie bequeathed funds for public buildings such as museums and libraries and for public landscapes including parks and cemeteries to commemorate and display its vision of British imperial power and culture as well as to reinforce, even venerate, the legacy of elite families in the city's history (Young 2001, 2003, 2005).
  12. Thompson also designed the Redpath family tombstone in Mount Royal Cemetery. Gratton's commission for the Roddick gates seems more personal than political; the architect married Grace, the daughter of Amy's brother Harold Redpath in 1923.
  13. While the Church of England took a dim view of the burial of suicides in consecrated ground, privileged families and sympathetic clerics in Britain often ignored these regulations. See Patricia Jalland (1996: 72-73). We are grateful to Dr. Richard Virr, archivist of the Diocese of Montreal, for explaining the situation in Canada. "All that was needed was a sympathetic cleric. Pastoral needs would almost always trump scruples," he noted in personal correspondence to David Theodore on October 19, 2009.
  14. On the expectations of single daughters, see Van Die (2005: 123).
  15. The mean age at first marriage in the province of Quebec in 1911 is 26.9 years of age for men and 24.1 years of age for women; see Pouyez et al (1983: 271, Tableau 6.11).
  16. In *Another City*, Upton notes more generally that the "urban cultural landscape" was "narrated more often than it was analyzed" (2008: 14).
  17. See *La Presse* June 14, 1901, 12.
  18. See the (Toronto) *Globe*, June 14, 1901, 1, 9.
  19. See Dean (2007).
  20. On the earnings of domestic servants in Canada, see Sager (2007).
  21. See Maxwell and Maxwell (1991).
  22. See the *Montreal Daily Star*, June 16, 1954.

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