

CREATING THE GARDEN OF CANADA: W T MACOUN AND THE GOSPEL OF HORTICULTURE

Edwinna von Baeyer

William Tyrrell Macoun (1869-1933) is an unsung hero of our horticultural past who had a significant impact on our gardens, orchards, and public landscapes. Macoun, our Renaissance man of horticulture, was determined to give Canadians the means to create what he called “a new Garden of Eden,” our own Garden of Canada.

As Dominion Horticulturist at the Central Experimental Farm in Ottawa from 1910 to his death in 1933, he was a prime mover on the Canadian horticultural scene. Armed with a strong sense of horticultural mission, Macoun was a prolific writer, a disciplined plant breeder, and a tireless promoter of a number of horticultural movements and philosophies.

This paper strives to demonstrate how Macoun’s work was inspired, consciously or unconsciously, by many of the themes and metaphors associated with gardening in Canada during his lifetime: nation building, social engineering, mental, spiritual and physical health, civic beautification, education of the young, and economic stability.

Macoun and the Horticultural Temper of His Times

Not only did Macoun’s articles appear in all the major magazines and journals of his day: he tirelessly spread the “gospel” of horticulture in person to horticultural, agricultural, and civic beautification societies across Canada. Macoun was a great enabler who helped Canadian home gardeners, nursery owners, fruit growers, and municipal officials translate the “ideal” into the “real.” He not only wanted to create and provide fruits, vegetables, flowers, trees, and shrubs hardy enough for all areas of Canada: he also wanted to add to the nation’s economy by increasing the harvests of economically important fruits and vegetables. He wanted to help spread “civilization” across the country by giving urban and rural gardeners and civic improvers the materials to beautify their homes, towns, and cities. As he wrote in 1910:

There is a growing sentiment in Canada in favor of Canadian things. We are becoming more proud of our country every year. We are looking for an individuality which will stand for Canada, and one of the best ways we can impress our individuality on the people of other countries and our own is to make Canadian trees, shrubs and herbaceous plants a prominent feature of our landscapes.¹

¹ W T Macoun, “Some of the Best Native Plants for Cultivation,” *Western Globe and Canadian Farmer*, 9 February 1910.

Macoun fit right in with those Canadians at the turn of the twentieth century who were determined to guide Canada into a glorious future. Put Canada on the world stage! they proclaimed. Help the country grow into its destiny, its greatness! Macoun took his place on the national scene during this heady time of political, economic, and horticultural activity.

Horticulture at this time was often characterized as the handmaiden of agriculture, which itself was defined as the main pillar of Canada's wealth. Much was at stake in advancing agriculture and horticulture in the late nineteenth century: settling the West, making the country fruitful and prosperous, building the nation.

Macoun was no stranger to nation building through agriculture and horticulture. He himself was the son of a famous nation builder. John Macoun, a staunch Presbyterian, immigrated to Canada from Ireland in 1850 with his family. A self-taught botanist, John rose from the position of village schoolteacher to become a college professor, a leading botanical explorer of the Canadian West, and, finally, Dominion Botanist of the Geological Survey of Canada. John is famous for his spirited justification of the agricultural capabilities of the western interior. His opinions helped confirm the route of the main line of the Canadian Pacific Railway through prairie grasslands.²

In the family of five children, W T Macoun was the second son. Born in 1869, he was thirteen when the family moved to Ottawa in 1882. Macoun accompanied his father on collecting trips from time to time until he joined the Central Experimental Farm.

What else do we know about Macoun? He had two daughters and a wife who died young. He loved poetry—he collected reams of it, which he wrote out in notebooks. It was said that he possessed and cultivated calmness of spirit, charity of judgment, and carefulness of statement. Yet, he was also gregarious, and could be heard on occasion declaiming poetry as he walked through demonstration plots and orchards on his visits to the various experimental stations. He was tall, strong, and active, and a great field naturalist. He was not college trained; but, as one of his contemporaries noted: “[H]is was the training of an able parent and the university of nature, coupled with a keen and observant mind, a retentive memory and an undaunted power of determination.”³

Most of what we know about Macoun is bound up in his forty-five year career with the national Experimental Farm System. In 1888, at age

² See W A Waiser's biography of John Macoun, *The Field Naturalist: John Macoun, the Geological Survey, and Natural Science* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989).

³“William Terrill Macoun, DSc, funeral oration,” 1933. Author's collection.

nineteen, Macoun was appointed, two years after the System was founded, as assistant to the director of the Central Experimental Farm—the first experimental farm in Canada.

The Central Experimental Farm, Ottawa

The Central Experimental Farm (CEF), located in Ottawa, was established in 1886 as the central research station of the newly formed Experimental Farms System of the federal Department of Agriculture. This bold program had a wide-ranging, nation-building mandate: to undertake agricultural research, and also to promote scientific, efficient farming practices across Canada, especially on the Prairies, where climate zones were presenting new challenges.

The breadth of the CEF's mandate was enormous. The main lines of research were: testing stock breeds; examining scientific and economic questions related to the dairy industry; testing the merits of cereals, field crops, grasses, forage plants, fruits, vegetables, plants, and trees; analysing and testing fertilizers and animal feed; studying plant diseases and treatments; testing agricultural seeds; and conducting any other experiments and research concerning Canada's agricultural industry.⁴

The CEF oversaw the other four experimental stations also created in 1886.⁵ William Saunders, the first director of the Experimental Farms System, believed that the Canadian West held the key to the country's agricultural prosperity. Saunders was a firm believer in the value of the new farming movement that was based on scientific research, agricultural improvement, and "book" farming. He also believed in and supported agricultural colleges, practical research programs, and agricultural societies. They were characterized as key elements for rural and agricultural progress and prosperity. Under Saunders, the efforts of the Experimental Farms System focussed on uniting scientific experimentation with practical verification.⁶

Saunders and his supporters, including Macoun, also believed farm beautification was a major element in the success of the "new farming" movement. A well-laid-out farm landscape, especially around the farm house, was said to directly reflect a farmer's efficient operations. A pleasing home farmstead (often characterized as a rural "Eden") would help keep

⁴Julie Harris and Jennifer Mueller, "Making Science Beautiful: The Central Experimental Farm, 1886-1939," *Ontario History*, vol 89, no 2 (June 1997), 106.

⁵Nappan, Nova Scotia; Brandon, Manitoba; Indian Head, Northwest Territories; Agassiz, British Columbia.

⁶ Harris and Muller, "Making Science Beautiful," 107.

farmers and their families on the land—a problem that was growing more acute as the twentieth century approached and more and more farmers left the countryside. If farmers did not remain there, it was said, the nation's economy and the foundation of Canada's social, moral, and religious values would be jeopardized.⁷

Writings in newspapers and magazines appeared that idealized country life. Rural life was praised as a natural setting where the highest ideals of morality, godliness, and purity could be reached. Fresh, untainted air, beautiful surroundings, healthy exercise, innocent pastimes, and a sense of community were contrasted with the polluted air, ugly street scapes, anonymity, vices, and the fast pace of city life.

Saunders and many of his agricultural contemporaries maintained that Canadian farmers should have “well-built, attractively designed homes, beautifully landscaped grounds and gardens, running water, telephones, electricity, good roads, a varied, wholesome diet and wider recreational and cultural opportunities.”⁸ However, before this rural Eden could be realized, farmers had to be given the raw materials and information to effect these changes. Macoun was the right person at the right time. He helped supply the horticultural tools to create this paradise through his writing, lecturing, and direction of the CEF's Horticultural Division.

Macoun's Work at the CEF

Macoun began his career as William Saunter's assistant, mostly doing manual labour. His first serious assignment was to pursue apple breeding work with Saunders and on his own. In 1893, five years after beginning at the CEF, he was re-appointed as assistant to the director with the additional duties as foreman of forestry. Two years later, he was placed in charge of the Arboretum and Botanic Garden. After that, he steadily rose through the CEF hierarchy. In 1898, he was appointed Horticulturist to the CEF in Ottawa and Curator of the Arboretum and Botanic Garden.

By 1903, his work was “probably more varied than that of any other

⁷ Proponents of agrarian idealism also played a major role in the movement to maintain the importance and vitality of rural Canada. The scope of this paper did not allow further investigation and description of this concept and its supporters. See Tom Nesmith's thesis, *The Philosophy of Agriculture: the Promise of the Intellect in Ontario Farming, 1835-1914* (Ottawa: Carleton University, 1988), for a thorough study of agrarian idealism, focussing on the Ontario Agricultural College (now the University of Guelph).

⁸ Nesmith, *The Philosophy of Agriculture*, 175.

horticulturist connected with experimental stations in North America.”⁹ In 1910, at age forty-one, Macoun was made Dominion Horticulturist, responsible for supervising the horticultural work of the entire Experimental Farms System, which eventually numbered twenty-seven stations and numerous sub-stations across Canada.

Garden Meanings and Metaphors Influencing Macoun

Before turning to the specifics of Macoun’s contributions, let us look a little closer at some of the themes, meanings, and metaphors surrounding the Canadian garden that actively influenced Macoun. Although the late nineteenth, early twentieth centuries were a time of optimism and nationalistic energy, it was also a time of uncertainty in Canada. Change was in the air. A lot of it was unsettling. However, the garden was still characterized as a place of repose, a symbol of peace, order and tranquillity—a refuge from the outside world, a manifestation of the divine.

These definitions were partly the direct influence of the British Romantic movement in the late 1700s and early 1800s. This movement glorified the natural world as an expression of untouched beauty, simplicity, and goodness. Because, the Romantics stated, people had lost the “ancient connection” to the natural world, they needed to refresh and invigorate their minds, bodies, and souls by reconnecting to nature. The British Natural Theology movement was also a major influence. Its members portrayed nature not only as a stimulus for inspiring profound emotions and aesthetic admiration, but also as an illustration of God’s grand design. Religion and nature were inextricably related. The study of nature in all its various forms became a worship of God and His works. This belief was shared by most North American scientists at the time, including Macoun. Therefore, collecting flowers, studying the habits of small furry animals, naming the stars—all were viewed as a form of religious worship.

Reform and Horticulture

By the 1890s, more Canadians were unsettled by rapid industrialization, growing urbanism, the beginnings of massive immigration from non-English and non-French-speaking countries, religious doubt as the realms of science and religion slowly separated from one another, and the growing recognition that society had many ills. Canadian society was in transition as people sought to come to terms with these events and doubts. Many looked around and saw things that needed to be changed and people who needed

⁹ *Ottawa Valley Journal*, 9 August 1904.

help. For example, it was a time when nearly every large Canadian city had a slum, when homeless children were sent to jail for stealing food, when the poor had no “social safety net” to protect them from the sickness and death that resulted from drinking contaminated water, labouring in sweat-shops, or eating poor diets.

In the face of this misery and unsettling changes, a spirit of improvement and reform burst on the Canadian scene. From the late 1800s until the late 1920s, Canadian society was characterized by a reforming zeal that, especially before the First World War, was buoyed up by a spirit of optimism. This would be Canada’s century!

Many reform organizations were already well-established by 1895. They dealt with a number of social problems, ranging from tuberculosis prevention to child welfare to municipal government reform. Unaesthetic, unplanned, unlandscaped areas came to be seen as social problems to be solved by enacting reforms.

It was also the era that Lady Aberdeen, wife of Governor General Aberdeen (1893-1898), made her impression on Canada, especially in the area of social welfare. Reform-minded, strong-willed, socially conscious, Lady Aberdeen was a firm supporter of the budding North American reform movement. It was the era of J J Kelso’s concern for neglected and abandoned children, which led to his founding the Children’s Aid Society in 1891. In the 1880s, a new movement, originating in Protestant evangelical churches, emerged in Britain and the United States, and spread to Canada. Called the “Social Gospel,” its proponents, led by the fiery J S Woodsworth, proclaimed that it was our duty to first make people’s lives better here on earth, before saving their souls for heaven. They gave religious significance to social involvement and proclaimed that God was working toward social change in order to create social justice for all. Churches, supported by voluntary organizations such as the Young Women’s Christian Association (founded in 1893), the Salvation Army, and the Women’s Christian Temperance Union, were inspired by the Social Gospel. Churches also sponsored relief agencies, charity drives, mission houses, social settlements, and social service councils.

The reformers were a mixture of middle class humanitarians, temperance workers, business promoters, evangelists, suffragettes, and professionals of many types—architects, doctors, journalists, educators, as well as clergy. The number of voluntary associations was so great in 1895 that it was remarked that “people had been seized by some inexplicable urge to save mankind.”¹⁰

The garden was drawn into this spirit of reform. The garden, once the

¹⁰ Robert Brown and Ramsay Cook, *Canada 1896-1921: A Nation Transformed*, (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1974), 3-4.

tranquil, certain symbol that "God's in his heaven, all's right with the world," suddenly became downright noisy, contentious, and yes, a bit self-righteous—"politically correct", we might say today. The "Garden of Canada" was a potent image that came to encompass more than a collection of hollyhocks and lilacs—it extended into political, religious, economic, and social areas. The garden assumed many burdens and became a metaphor for civic duty and responsibility, civilizing raw towns and cities, especially in the newly developing West, Canadianizing new immigrants, providing wholesome exercise for the lower classes, keeping children in school, keeping rural families on the farm, beautifying our cities and towns, as well as providing economic stability. Although nature was to be controlled, exploited, and dominated in order to build a strong, prosperous Canada, it was also portrayed as the realm of an earlier, simpler, happier state of society. Canadians were to take to heart the Biblical injunction to cultivate the earth, make the wild places smooth, and create a garden. Biblical typology conjured up images of rural goodness, rural paradise, the Garden of Eden, overlaid with images of fecundity, growth, "noble labour," and nature as a healer of psychological, physical, and spiritual woes, contributing to the view of gardening as a form of spiritual uplift.

Social critics were concerned by the increasing numbers of urban Canadians who, they felt, were becoming unhealthily divorced from the healing quality of nature, the goodness of rural life, and the moral benefits of the garden. They were exposed to urban dissipation and to the ugliness of a typical urban street scape—which often was a profusion of utility poles, billboards, garbage heaps, chaotic mixtures of architectural styles, lack of vegetation, and a general drabness—all said to undermine one's mental health. Canadians were to garden to save their city-weary souls, to make themselves whole.

Many of these themes were adopted by the sympathetic Macoun, a staunch Presbyterian. For example, Macoun wholeheartedly endorsed the consensus that flowers were good for the soul. In 1896 he advised his readers in the *Ottawa Tribune* to spend a few cents on flower seeds. He wrote:

If you do not think you can afford to buy any seeds, I am sure that there are many ways in which most of you can economize to save the necessary amount. Fifty cents would buy you quite a variety Make up your mind to forgo riding on the street cars for a time. Spend less on things which are not absolutely necessary, and even if needs be go without a meal or two but buy some flower seeds.¹¹

¹¹ Macoun, "The Garden," *The Ottawa Tribune*, 9 May 1896.

Enthusiastic horticultural reformers urged Canadians to hoe, weed, and plant. Once gardeners became healthy and energetic weeding their marigolds, they were not to linger with the petunias, but were urged to carry the horticultural message out beyond their home gardens. It was their civic duty. Gardeners were not just to weed their own gardens, but society's as well. Reform, civic improvement, beautification, and nation building were all rolled together into one neat horticultural package.

Beautification Movements

The major, motivating movement that epitomized the integration of the reform movement and the garden, and which would greatly influence Macoun, was the City Beautiful movement. Begun in the United States in the 1890s, this movement galvanized many Canadians, especially in urban Canada. The turn of the century witnessed a flurry of activity as professionals began drawing up plans to achieve the ideal City Beautiful—a city of parks, trees, boulevards, and stately buildings.

As well, smaller, less grandiose beautifying efforts were undertaken by small, amateur groups—mostly horticultural and civic improvement groups. They went about "planting up" the city, carrying on the fight against ugliness. Some also turned their attention to rural beautification, in which the Experimental Farms System and Macoun were leaders.

Answering the call from dedicated civic beautifiers for "missionaries of beauty to enlist in this crusade against ugliness," a variety of public plantings were successfully initiated in addition to rural beautification efforts. These activities included street tree planting, the beautification of the public ground of churches, government buildings, and schools, clean-up campaigns; and the intensification of urban and rural home beautification. High board fences were torn down around house lots, backyard ash heaps were transformed into lawn and flowers. Vines were trained up factory walls, flower boxes sprouted from municipal windows, and flower beds graced vacant ground near public buildings.

One of the largest corporate gardeners was the Canadian Pacific Railway Company, which, by the 1930s, oversaw gardens at its stations and transfer points along 25,000 kilometres of track, from coast to coast. The two larger movements of public park building and vacant lot gardening were also emerging at this time.

Schools were not ignored. School grounds were characterized as public eyesores or as wastelands in the countryside. The ideal, which a few schools achieved, was a properly landscaped site with flower beds, shrub borders and lawn and circular drive at the entrance. School grounds beautification and its partner, school gardens for students, were responses to City Beautiful thought and action pervading Canadian society, mainly in eastern Canada. School gardens were also a response to the growing

concern over primary education and the increasing rural problem—how to "keep 'em down on the farm." Social commentators feared that rural society, defined as the rock on which Canada stood, was disintegrating. Hundreds of farm families were moving away from the uncertainties and isolation of farm life to the city.

The school garden movement included plots of vegetables, flowers, and trees tended by the students. The gardens, supported by provincial departments of education, were promoted as an educational reform leading to good citizenship, love of nature, rejuvenation of rural life, and a concrete basis for the three R's.

As the garden was being pushed into the public arena, it was also being sharpened into a tool to help shape morality and society. A rose was no longer a rose, but also a symbol of righteous gardening and correct living. Middle class reformers were worried that some members of the working class were weakening the moral tone of the country. Some were said to be spending their wages in the tavern rather than on their families. Others, the reformers charged, were being dangerously swayed by ideas of collectivity, unions, and the rights of the working man. Working in the garden would cure all this. The vacant lot garden movement was certainly an outgrowth of this sentiment.

Other pre-First World War reformers, fearing the threat to the status quo from the thousands of immigrants flooding into Canada, sought solutions to the question of how to Canadianize these newcomers. One of the suggestions was gardening. Horticultural volunteers would teach gardening to immigrants to help them learn English, as well as to use the garden as a vehicle to teach them the traditions of their new country.

Horticulturists also used the garden to build the nation by promoting horticultural industries. The advance of our fruit industry, for example, was part of the national support for the gospel of horticultural progress. The Experimental Farm System was a leader in promoting and supporting this industry. By 1916, after thirty years of the CEF's work and promotion, Macoun could confidently state that fruit production was now one of Canada's chief industries.

Horticultural Support System

Macoun not only believed in the gospel of horticulture, he lived it, he wrote about it, he spread the word. Within his work, the horticultural reform movement and the mission of the Experimental Farms System was united and transformed into an effective engine of change. This is particularly obvious in how Macoun upheld and participated in the three main supports of horticulture in pre-1930 Canada: the garden nursery industry, horticultural writing, and plant breeding. For example, demand for plant material stimulated nursery development. Increased gardening activity, in turn, stimulated a demand for greater varieties of hardy plants and encouraged

publication of gardening advice. As public knowledge increased, more demands were made, hybridists and nurserymen were motivated, garden writing was stimulated, greater gardening activity resulted, more demands for hardy plants were made, and so on.

So how did Macoun's efforts actually fit into this horticultural support system? He promoted and supported advances in the knowledge and testing of effective horticultural practices for fruits, vegetables, and ornamentals; extended growing ranges for all plants; and ensured that more species and varieties were available commercially. He also seriously supported activities and research leading to urban and rural beautification, economic prosperity, and feeding Canada and the world.

Macoun's Plant Breeding Work

Breeding and introducing cold climate plants, trees, fruits, and vegetables was one of the top priorities for the Experimental Farms System. Macoun oversaw most of the hybridizing work for fruit, vegetables, trees, shrubs, and ornamental plants. The CEF early on had become the centre of systematic plant breeding experiments across Canada. Extending the growing range for economic and ornamental plants was a key factor in ensuring a strong, prosperous nation that could feed itself, beautify our landscapes, and help feed the world.

Macoun was not working in a vacuum. Much was happening on the Canadian horticultural scene before the CEF was established. Individual plant breeders had worked on a variety of plants and trees before the 1890s, but as Macoun observed in 1931, "their work was done on a relatively small scale as they had neither the means, the land nor the time to do this work in a large, continuous way."¹² Many horticultural advances in the mid-1800s until the turn of the century occurred through trial and error. Amateur gardeners would putter in their gardens, testing new plants, breeding new varieties. However, once the Experimental Farm System was founded, horticultural improvement was organized and systematized. Before this time, horticultural information was exchanged during meetings of agricultural societies, fruit growers' associations, and horticultural societies, and published in their annual reports, newspapers, and farm magazines.

By the turn of the century, Macoun was poised to implement his ideals and wishes for the progress of Canadian horticulture. He had the authority through his position at the CEF to turn the abstract into the real, to realize the metaphors and meanings related to the garden. He was ready to effect real change—to create the garden of Canada.

¹² National Archives of Canada, RG 17, vol 4300, file: W T Macoun Articles, 1929. W T Macoun, *Fifty Years of Canadian Horticulture* (Ottawa: Department of Agriculture, 1931) 22; typescript.

Under Macoun's direction, horticultural techniques such as shipping, storage, cultivation, and fertilizing were addressed by the CEF's Horticultural Division. For example, in 1932 the Horticulture Divisions did the following work: experimented in methods of fertilizing and cultivating soils, especially for fruit-growing conditions; bred new fruit varieties; studies on the economic production of cider; experimented with cold storage techniques; bred earlier-harvested vegetable varieties; produced and promoted Canadian-grown vegetable seeds; rationalized the naming of vegetable varieties; and bred hardy ornamentals and greenhouse plants.¹³

And with each advance in shipping techniques and the opening of more markets, new and better varieties of plants were constantly sought. Plant breeders, Macoun felt, were more important than ever.

Macoun personally focussed on apple breeding and improvement, although he also made major advances in potato breeding. The apple itself held potent symbolic value, especially in the Judeo-Christian tradition. Regarded as the first tree in the first garden, an apple tree was a powerful demonstration that the wilderness had been tamed and the land made safe.¹⁴

Macoun paid special attention to developing a hardy winter apple that was, as one commentator noted, "of fine appearance and good dessert quality, believing that such an apple would be of inestimable value to the colder parts of Canada."¹⁵ In 1907, he compiled a list of all the varieties of native and hybridized fruits in Canada. He himself originated the Melba, Joyce, Hume, Lobo and Linda apples.¹⁶ He also supported amassing the best collection of hardy apple varieties in America at the Morden, Manitoba, Experimental Station. In fact, Macoun and Saunders' testing and hybridizing was said to have "laid the cornerstone for apple breeding for the Canadian Prairies."¹⁷ Between 1900 and 1930, Macoun and Saunders won prestigious honours for their apples and were responsible for naming 105 apple

¹³ Central Experimental Farm, Horticultural Division, Annual Report for 1932.

¹⁴ Ronald Rees, *New and Naked Land: Making the Prairies Home* (Saskatoon, Sask: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1988), 113.

¹⁵ "Mr W T Macoun, Canada's Leading Horticulturist," *The Canadian Horticulturist*, vol 30, no 5, 1907, 125.

¹⁶ Most of these apples have disappeared from our grocery stores, although the Lobo is occasionally found.

¹⁷ "William Terrill Macoun, DSc, funeral oration," 1933.

varieties and hybridizing 16 named varieties.¹⁸ In fact, “Saunders hybrids” became synonymous with hardiness for fruit growers living in challenging climate zones.¹⁹

After the First World War, Macoun responded to the call for an expanded range of ornamentals suited to our various climate zones by searching for someone to undertake the experimental work. He did an exceptional thing for his time. In 1920, he hired Isabella Preston for this position. This shy Englishwoman, in just eight years after arriving in Canada, had progressed from an exceptional student at the Ontario Agricultural College, now the University of Guelph, to become one of the top hybridists in Canada. Her long and illustrious career encompassed breeding roses, Siberian iris, crabapples, and lilies.²⁰

With Miss Preston’s concentrated efforts, testing and breeding new varieties of ornamental plants for home gardens became one of the Horticultural Division’s main activities. Macoun, writing in 1932, justified the program: “[I]t is believed that the beautifying of home surroundings does much to make a contented and happy people.”²¹

Macoun was also involved, through his membership on the Canadian Horticultural Council,²² in one of the most important horticultural programs of his day—plant registration. He and other Council members saw by the 1920s that the proliferation of hybridists and the resulting multiplication of new varieties of shrubs, plants and trees was causing some concern in the industry. Not only did chaos reign in maintaining records of new varieties to prevent duplication of names and products, but the lack of protection of hybridists’ labour was also allowing fraud, misappropriation of names,

¹⁸ Macoun, *The Apple in Canada: Its Cultivation and Improvement*, Bulletin no 86. (Ottawa: Department of Agriculture, 1916), 15, 25.

¹⁹ Rees, *New and Naked Land*, 113.

²⁰ See, Edwinna von Baeyer, “The Horticultural Odyssey of Isabella Preston,” *Canadian Horticultural History*, vol 1, no 3 (1987).

²¹ Macoun, “Leadership and Contributions Planned for the Horticultural Division for 1932”; typescript. Author’s collection.

²² Begun in the early 1920s, the Canadian Horticultural Council included representatives from various horticultural sectors such as fruit, vegetable, flower growers, nursery owners, etc. The Council would discuss various pressing issues and, if warranted, would recommend to the Minister of Agriculture to enact legislation. National Archives of Canada, RG17, vol 4300, File: W T Macoun Articles 1928, 6-7. W T Macoun, “Horticultural Development in Canada,” March 1928; typescript.

wrongful claims of “authorship,” etc.

The Canadian Horticultural Council felt plant registration promoted quality horticulture in Canada as well as ensuring a fair monetary reward for hybridists’ labours and an inducement to continue. Plant registration was also seen as protecting consumers, who could then be confident that the named plant they were buying was the true variety.

Macoun’s Civic Conscience

Macoun took his duty to society seriously. His memberships read like a Who’s Who of Ottawa and of the major North American horticultural, fruit growers, and civic improvement associations of the day. He was an elder of Ottawa’s St Andrews Presbyterian Church. He also took a very active part in the Ottawa Horticultural Society. As well, he was a sought-after judge for garden competitions in Ottawa sponsored by the wives of two Governors General: Lady Minto and Lady Grey. Lady Minto established the garden competition because she felt that there was much room for horticultural improvement and beautification in Ottawa.

Macoun’s Support for the Home Garden

The necessity of a home garden was one of Macoun’s favourite themes in his lectures and writings. He often reinforced popular opinion about the mental, physical, and social benefits that a pleasing arrangement of flower beds and lawn was said to have for keeping young people down on the farm, reducing delinquency, and keeping families together.

Macoun put the argument for home gardens more dramatically:

There is many a house in Ottawa before whose front door the weeds flourish in summer as they do in some of the vacant lots in this city.... If you desire your sons to take prominent positions in the world, and what father does not? If you desire your daughters to marry well, and what mother does not? Teach them in their youth that neatness, good taste, and cleanliness are most essential to success and one way that you may illustrate these requisites is by keeping your house outside as well as inside in perfect order.

Now is the time to ... make your house look like a home instead of a habitation merely. Can you with an easy conscience sing “Home Sweet Home” when you know that in a few weeks you will have to pick the burrs off your trousers as you pass out to your work in the morning?²³

²³ Macoun, “The Garden,” *The Ottawa Tribune*, April 25, 1896.

However, he did not confine himself to uttering general words of support or high-flown rhetoric on the beauty of hedges, perennial beds, or shade trees. He always gave his audience cultivation and maintenance details, and made caring for these plants and trees sound easy.

Macoun also worked to rid what many Canadian gardeners often felt: a certain inferiority when comparing their landscapes and gardens to those in the horticultural capital of the world—Great Britain. In an article on hardy climbers for Canadian homes, he touched upon this issue:

When the newcomer to Canada, from Great Britain or Ireland, sets foot in this country in early spring, as frequently happens, he is at once struck with the absence, or apparent absence, of vines on the public buildings, private houses, fences, outbuildings, and other places which he as been accustomed to see continually clothed with the evergreen English ivy.

The contrast is very striking, and it is greatly to the disadvantage of Canada at the time. In a few weeks, however, all this is changed, and, when the leaves expand on the Japanese or Boston Ivy, Virginia Creeper, Dutchman's Pipe, American Bittersweet, Clematis, and other climbers, our new friends find that the houses and larger buildings are not so bare as they at first seemed and will now compare very favourably in appearance with those in the Old Country.

And what a difference vines make in the appearance of a place! The architecture of many houses and other buildings in Canada is very plain, not to say unattractive or ugly, but vines hide the stiff and unsightly lines and make really plain buildings very pleasing to the eye. A vine-covered wall, fence, or pergola, a trellis of climbing roses, or clematis, need but be mentioned to bring to the mind of the reader places he or she knows where these have given distinction to a home which would otherwise be rather uninteresting.

Vines are so easy to establish and they make such a change in the appearance of a place in a short time, with comparatively little outlay, that the planting of them should not be delayed²⁴

Vacant Lot Garden Support

Macoun also lent his support to the vacant lot garden movement. This movement was first promoted as a support for the poor, a form of social welfare and food security. Then the force of the City Beautiful movement swept the vacant lot into beautification activities. Weed-filled neglected city lots became symbols of urban blight. Gardening on them became part of the horticultural reformer's duty to their towns and cities.

Then with the outbreak of the First World War, the vacant lot garden was transformed into a symbol of patriotism and renamed a war garden.

²⁴ Macoun, "Hardy Climbers for Canadian Homes," *Canadian Homes and Gardens*, 1926; typescript. Author's collection.

Macoun had a long poem in his notebook collection that support this sentiment. It ends with these lines:

That task is o'er, the war is won, the battle flags are furled,
And kitchen gardens once despised, did help to save the world.

Macoun helped popularize the patriotic duty of converting commercial, private and civic lands into vegetable patches. He taught courses, sponsored by the CEF, on "food crops as war-time work for profit and patriotism." Macoun's specialty was lecturing on how to grow the maximum potato crop on a city lot. He also issued special pamphlets from the CEF to aid this work across the country. In 1918, poetry lover that he was, he even sponsored a vacant lot garden poetry contest.²⁵

Macoun and Dissemination of Horticultural Knowledge

As mentioned earlier, garden writing was one of the three main supports of the Canadian garden in this heady period between 1890 and 1930. Macoun was certainly one of Canada's most prolific and influential garden writers at this time. During his years at the CEF, he wrote and published steadily—articles, bulletins and pamphlets, averaging between eight and ten publications a year, and sometimes more. His many valuable, exhaustive bulletins included those on the cultivation of the apple in Canada, plum culture, bush fruit culture, strawberry culture, potato culture, hardy roses in Canada, trees, shrubs, and perennials tested in the CEF arboretum, as well as many smaller pamphlets and circulars on specific ornamentals, fruits, and vegetables. This was in addition to his annual reports and his lectures given before many audiences across Canada while travelling on administrative duties.

Macoun wrote for general audiences as well as professional

²⁵ Here is an excerpt from the winning entry:
Rain-softened and sun-warmed, it stretches fair.
Prepared to yield a wealth of all good things.
In neat, well-ordered rows the seedlings pierce
The rich brown mould, and seek the sunlight.

Swift fly the days, and soon with eager hands
I cull the radish, ruddy tinted globe
Of pungent crispness, and green-gold lettuce,
And that scented darling of the garden,
The spring onion. The happy days glide on.
Behold my Vacant Lot, vacant no more.

Henrietta Wood, "My Garden—1917," *Manitoba Horticulturist*,
March 1918, 31.

horticulturists, scientists and academics. He wrote on every conceivable horticultural topic in all the important magazines of his day: *Family Herald*, *Canadian Countryman*, *Canadian Horticulturist*, *Canadian Florist*, *Canadian Homes and Gardens*. Competent and matter of fact, Macoun's writings were praised for their "clearness and practicability." He would answer questions about how to stop a cherry tree bleeding, how to grow spruce trees from cuttings, the best strawberry varieties, how to prevent and cure the black knot disease on fruit trees, how to propagate pears, or the best flowering vine varieties. He reassured his readers that by following the rules, they too could be successful gardeners.

In his writings, Macoun also communicated his joy and enthusiasm for plants and horticulture. His warmth of personality often comes through. As well, his typically Victorian sentimentality is also evident. For example, writing about rock gardens he notes that

some of the rock plants are very tiny and these have a great charm for the flower lover. It is natural for both men and women to be attracted to and to care for small things whether it be children, household pets or plants, and rock and alpine flowers are the jewels among plants as children are the jewels among humankind.²⁶

Macoun adapted to technological change to spread the message of horticulture, to help and instruct. In the late 1920s and up to his death, he wrote and read charming, short radio talks. For example, he once told an Ottawa audience during a talk on the home fruit garden that

the desire for fruit is so strong in us that during our childhood one of the greatest temptations, that boys especially have to withstand, is to see the ripening and attractive fruit hanging in a neighbour's garden with a frail fence between and not be able to have any of it. Alas! Sometimes boys yield to temptation and other, doubtfully good, and cowardly boys wait outside to share in the plunder.²⁷

Macoun was a tireless lecturer. Not surprisingly, this most gregarious of men was called an "indefatigable platform man."²⁸ His lectures were praised as major vehicles for widely spreading the knowledge of horticulture to

²⁶ Macoun, Attractions of a Rock Garden, 5 February 1932; typescript. Author's collection.

²⁷ National Archives of Canada, RG 17, vol 4300, file: W T Macoun– Articles 1925. W T Macoun, "The Home Fruit Garden," 1925.

²⁸ *Ottawa Citizen*, 31 May, 1911.

groups across Canada, such as Women's Institutes, professional organizations, church groups, horticultural societies, provincial fruit growers associations, as well as the federal Standing Committee on Agriculture and Colonization.

His writing, speaking, supervising, and hands-on work had the immediate result of a veritable shower of honours and medals throughout his life from Europe, Canada, and the United States. Through Macoun's efforts and writings, the Canadian garden certainly expanded commercially and aesthetically.

Macoun's Legacy

Thus, by the time of Macoun's death in 1933, the Canadian garden had come of age. However, now that the noise has died down, what remains of the horticultural reformers' efforts? How do we assess Macoun's legacy?

On balance, the lasting benefits of many of the themes and metaphors applied to the garden discussed here cannot be proven given the research done to date. For example, did gardening lead to a more religious, healthy, and contented population? We do not know. But what we do know is that some of these themes have reappeared in recent decades and many are alive today under different names. For example, spirituality. Today we read about the popularity of garden mazes as an aid to spiritual contemplation. Gardening as a metaphor for physical and mental health surfaces as part of the fitness craze, hortitherapy programs, organic food promotions and so on. Germaine Greer has even entered the garden. She advises menopausal women to garden to reduce menopausal symptoms—even going so far to advocate aggressively deadheading roses as an effective release for so-called menopausal rage. Vacant lot gardening lives on in the rise of allotment gardening seen in the 1970s and in contemporary community gardening programs.

Did gardens keep the rural population stable, prosperous, and the repository of our moral and spiritual values? In a word, no. Agriculture no longer drives our economy. Recently, rural Canada has unfortunately been under fire for environmental and health abuses—from threats to drinking water, to growing genetically modified foods, to overuse of pesticides and herbicides.

So where is the legacy most evident? Probably in beautification activities and the increased numbers of ornamental, fruit, and vegetable varieties. The amount of new plant material created by hybridists and introduced by experimenters expanded colour and hardiness ranges. This, in turn, allowed Canadian gardeners to design gardens of greater sophistication and variety. This activity was supported by the horticultural press, by improved nursery

stock and shipping methods, and by public support of beautification efforts. This period, spanning Macoun's working life, was transitional in Canadian gardening. We emerged out of a pioneering, clearing-the-land phase and into a gar-den-as-art phase.

The City Beautiful movement and Macoun's strong role in it certainly had an impact we can still see today. Flower boxes on Main Street, the proliferation of public parks, the popularity of front and backyard gardens—all attest to the permanence of their efforts. The metaphors have changed, although the sentiments seem remarkably similar. Today we talk about the benefits of green spaces, city-sponsored tree plantings, and so on, as adding to our quality of life.

Macoun had his feet firmly planted in both worlds—the romantic vision and the social and economic view of the garden. Through his work, Macoun kept many of the economic, social, and religious garden themes and metaphors alive and in the public consciousness. He was an important voice and certainly one of the most influential enablers in our horticultural history. Of course, he did not accomplish all these improvement and reforms single-handedly. Many other individuals and organizations also played a major part.

His work and enthusiasm, however, greatly influenced the development of horticulture in Canada and placed trowels in more Canadian hands. Macoun not only helped us gain and maintain a belief in the possibilities and promise of the Canadian garden, he gave us the tools and materials to realize these possibilities. No matter how the garden's themes and metaphors have evolved and been transformed, Macoun's life work provided the foundation on which we continue to interpret these meanings, creating gardens to reflect our own dreams and passions.