

The Score

MCPA Association Newsletter
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The Maritime Conservatory of the Performing Arts is now in its 130th year. This issue of *The Score* is dedicated to its early history—its founding, first Director, earliest home, the creation of the Association, the various names by which the Conservatory has been known, and the Association Archives



Image by Ed MacDormand

The Founding



Halifax County Academy, c. 1890

In the second half of the 19th century, Haligonians of Scottish background were prominent in the city’s banking, mercantile, political, religious, and intellectual life. By reputation they had a strong respect for education, yet their daughters, like most upper-middle class girls of the day, were still largely schooled at home. Female post-elementary public schooling was still in its infancy, and it was only in 1885 that girls were admitted to the *Halifax County Academy* on Brunswick Street. Sacred Heart School had been open, primarily for Catholic girls since 1849, and there were also residential schools for both boys and girls at Acadia (Baptist) and Mount Allison (Methodist), but no school catered to the daughters of the Scottish Presbyterian elite.

Prompted perhaps by a zeal for female education associated with excitement about Queen Victoria’s Golden Jubilee, leaders of the Maritime Scottish Presbyterian community began to discuss the possibility of opening a school for girls in Halifax’s South End. Preliminary consultation culminated in an August 11, 1886 meeting held at the YMCA, at which the creation of an Institution of Learning for Young Ladies, associated with the Presbyterian Church, was discussed. The 32 men present were primarily from Nova Scotia, although there were also representatives from New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island. Most of these individuals would later become the members of the first Board of Governors, the same Board serving both the Halifax Conservatory and the Halifax Ladies’ College.

The Rev. Robert Laing, minister of St. Matthew’s Presbyterian Church, was one of the organizing group’s leaders, and he was to become the first Principal of the sister-institutions. Laing later stated that “this Board consists of some of the leading businessmen, of several well-known educationists, and a fair representation of ministers.” This was obviously a well-connected and influential group, and Laing had neglected to note that among the Board’s members were also senior politicians—municipal, provincial, and federal—as well as lawyers and judges.

In May of 1887, the Halifax Ladies’ College and the Halifax Conservatory of Music were made a body corporate in connection with the Presbyterian Church in Canada by an act of the Nova Scotia Legislature, with the Church appointing several members of the joint Board for the sister organizations.

The Goal of the founders “was to establish in Halifax and in connection with the Halifax Ladies’ College a school of music complete in all essential departments and equipped to give the best instruction in all the

branches of the art and science of music.” On September 10, 1887, the *Presbyterian Witness* published the following advertisement on its front page.

“The **Conservatory of Music**, 164 to 172 Pleasant Street, Opens September 15th, 9 a.m. The Conservatory, while started in connection with the Halifax Ladies’ College, is a separate institution and is open to all wishing instruction in any of its departments, whether students in the College or not. The following Branches will be taught:

1. **Theory of Music**—Embracing Harmony, Counterpoint, Canon and Fugue, forms of composition and instrumentation.
2. **Singing**—Embracing Elementary Classes for Sight-Reading, Voice Culture and Solo Singing.
3. **Piano-Forte Playing**—Embracing Elementary and Technical Exercises, ensemble playing (duos, trios, etc.) and training in artistic performances as respect style, expression, conception, etc.
4. **Organ Playing**—With special reference to the use of the instrument in Church services and a competent knowledge of its construction.
5. **Violin Playing**—Elementary and Advanced.
6. **Lectures on Practical Musical Subjects and Forms of Composition** will be given and will be free to all students of the Conservatory.

Methods of instruction employed in the standard musical institutions of Europe will be used, and all departments of the Conservatory will be under the immediate supervision of the Director, thus ensuring a systematic development and advancement of the pupils.

The Conservatory is under the direction of C.H. Porter, Jr., of the Royal Conservatory of Leipzig, who will furnish information with respect to terms, etc. Mr. Porter will have a staff of efficient assistants in each department.”

In addition to the “branches” mentioned in the advertisement, the Conservatory offered instruction in all the major musical instruments and also in foreign languages (French, German, and Italian), ensemble and orchestral playing, and Kindergarten Music Method.

For at least the next half-century, the Conservatory was the city’s primary “music-making organization, both teaching and performing. With symphony orchestra, choir, soloists, recitals, ballet, dance and opera performances, the Conservatory became the focal point of concert life in the Maritimes”.

The Conservatory’s First Home



On May 29, 1887, through the efforts of the Rev. Robert Laing, property at 164-172 Pleasant Street (now Barrington Street) at the corner of Pleasant and Harvey Streets, was purchased for \$11,000 as the new home of the Halifax Conservatory of Music and the Halifax Ladies’ College. According to Sandra MacLeod, in her *A History of the Halifax Ladies’ College* (1973), the land was originally

“granted to John Murphy, who came to Halifax with the Honorable Edward Cornwallis in 1749. He cleared the land between Morris and Green Streets, and operated a farm which supplied the town with butter, eggs, and milk. On the death of the first owner in 1802 the land came into



Richard John Uniacke, Jr.

the possession of James Fitzgerald, who bequeathed the estate to Richard John Uniacke, Jr.”.

Uniacke (1789-1834), one time Attorney General of Nova Scotia, built an imposing house on the site as a home for his bride, a large, wooden building, with a double-bow front, and originally painted a dull red colour. There was a circular driveway and eventually a pair of tennis courts. Surrounded by an iron fence, there was a large ornamental gate at the Pleasant Street entrance.

The family lived in the house until 1854, when Uniacke’s widow sold it to the Duffus family who, in turn, were to live there for the next thirty-three years. The Duffus’ were prominent Halifax merchants, and John Duffus was one of a small group of men who in 1864 founded the Merchants Bank (now the Royal Bank of Canada). John Duffus and his son William were both founding members of the Halifax Club, and the Duffus family was connected by marriage to other members of the Halifax elite, including the Cunards, Morrrows, Salters, and the Stairs.



Halifax Club

The new institution opened to immediate success; by the end of the first year there were already 239 students. During the Conservatory’s second year, classes were taught by 19 teachers in a rented house across the street, as the upper floors of the original house were needed for boarders. By the spring of 1889 new wings had been added, and the Conservatory moved into the top floor of one of the new sections of the building.



As Army Hostel, 1942

The Barrington Street property was to remain the home of the Halifax Conservatory and the Halifax Ladies’ College until war broke out in 1939. On December 6th, the building was expropriated for use as an army hostel run by the YMCA. The \$60,000 received allowed the sister-institutions to pay off accumulated debts. After the war, the organizations were offered the opportunity to return to their original home on Barrington Street. The Ladies’ College, comfortably settled at its new Oxford Street Home (now Armbrae Academy), decided to remain where they were. The Conservatory, however, returned to the old property but only until 1949. Despite the physical separation, the close association between the two institutions, including a single Board of Governors, was to continue, however, until 1952.

The Conservatory’s First Director



St. Paul’s Church, 1896

Charles Porter (1856-1929) was born in Naugatuck, Connecticut. By 1876, he had followed his musician brother Samuel to Halifax, at least as a some-time visitor. Samuel was a performer, teacher, and the organist and choir director at St. Paul’s Anglican Church. Charles Porter’s first known performance in the city was in January 1877, when he conducted the 150-voice Halifax Musical Union (sometimes called the Halifax Philharmonic Union), with soloists



Academy of Music

from Boston, in the first of three inaugural concerts at the splendid Academy of Music, located beside St. Matthew's Church in the site that was later to become the Capital Theatre, in turn replaced by the Maritime Centre. Porter's conducting was generally well received, although *The Citizen's* reviewer had one reservation: "If he would only keep his feet quiet.... Perhaps he does not know how disagreeable it is to the audience to hear his unnecessary stamping."



Royal Conservatory, Leipzig, Late 19th century

By 1881, Charles Porter was a full-time resident of Halifax and the organist and choirmaster at St. Matthew's Church, at the time the largest Presbyterian Church in the Maritimes. From 1883 to 1886, however, he studied at Leipzig's **Royal Conservatory of Music**, after which he returned to Halifax, resuming his position at St. Matthew's. Musicologist Dr. Nancy Vogan, Professor Emeritus at Mount Allison, has reported that his work "gave great satisfaction to the session and board of trustees [of St. Matthew's], whose reports in the 1890s praise his able conduct of 'the psalmody of the church' and noted that 'under his efficient leadership' the choir had been greatly enlarged and musical services much improved'."



Porter continued at St. Matthew's as organist until 1906.

Porter was also the founding conductor (1882-1906) of the Orpheus Club, a male choir that initially had about 75 members, including both trained and amateur singers. After 1886 women were welcomed as auxiliaries, particularly for opera performances. That same year the choir opened its own Orpheus Hall [perhaps on Granville Street], where a wide range of performances were held for a number of years until financial problems necessitated its sale.

Porter met his first wife, Maria Louisa, in Halifax. She was a gifted pianist—"one of the most brilliant...in this city"—according to the *Halifax Morning Herald*. Like her husband, she had studied in Leipzig. Sadly, Maria died in 1888 giving birth to a still-born son.

As organist at St. Matthew's, Charles Porter worked closely with the church's minister the Rev. Robert Laing. Porter was invited by Rev. Laing to become the Conservatory's first Director. In addition to his administrative duties, Porter also taught piano, theory, and eventually composition. He was described by music historian Helmut Kallmann as a "composer of rank" whose pieces for piano "are reported to suggest Chopin and to be of great difficulty."

While Porter had been a music student in Leipzig, one of his fellow students was American Mr. George Whitefield Chadwick who was to become director of the New England Conservatory. The two men established not only a friendship but also a working relationship between their respective institutions, and for many years graduates of the Boston music school were hired as teachers at the Halifax Conservatory.



George Chadwick

In 1891, Porter founded The Dresden Trio (also known as the Leipzig Trio) who gave the first known public performance at the Conservatory. All three members of the Trio were on the Conservatory's staff; the other two were Heinrich Klingefeld (violin) and Ernst Doering (cello).



Dalhousie College, 1887

In 1898, under Porter’s leadership, the Halifax Conservatory and Dalhousie University entered into a formal affiliation whereby the University would award a Bachelor of Music degree to students who had completed a prescribed course. Initially a number of examiners were appointed by the University to oversee the students’ performance—Porter was one of two examiners in music theory—but after only one year this system was dropped: Dalhousie was satisfied that success in the Conservatory’s own examinations was a sufficient guarantee of the students’ performance for them to be awarded a degree.

Charles Porter’s performance as Director of the Halifax Conservatory was highly regarded. Vogan quotes one of his contemporaries who commented that Porter “filled the position of director ‘with unqualified success...combining his musical talent with an ability for business, seldom seen in a musician. He might aptly be called one of the Fathers of Music in Halifax. For it is through his patient and capable teaching that Halifax can boast of so many home-reared artists in the piano and organ branches.’” As a testament to the seriousness of the Conservatory’s students and of the excellent of its teaching, during the last year of Porter’s tenure as Director there were no fewer than ten graduates of the Conservatory who were continuing their studies in Germany, most in Leipzig but some also in Berlin.

After thirteen years at the helm of the Halifax Conservatory, in 1900 Porter resigned his position as Director to assume the position of Maritime manager for the Equitable Life Assurance Society of the United States. He remained active in the musical life of the city, however, continuing as organist at St. Matthew’s and his association with the Dresden (or Leipzig) Trio and the Orpheus Choir. In 1906 Porter left Halifax to return to his native country, where he became the Connecticut manager of Equitable Life. He died in New Haven in 1929 and was buried in the Union Cemetery in Stratford, Ct.

The Founding of the Conservatory Association



Harry Dean

It was Harry Dean, Director of the Halifax Conservatory of Music from 1906 to 1934, who first proposed the creation of a society of the Conservatory’s graduates. A meeting was held on June 13, 1921 at the Conservatory’s home on Barrington Street “for the purpose of organizing a Society of Graduates of the Halifax Conservatory of Music (or similar organization).” The subject was introduced by Mr. Dean, and the group was addressed by the Reverend Dr. J.W. Falconer who was associated with the Conservatory for several decades as a core member of the governing board. Before joining the Faculty of the city’s



Fort Massey

Presbyterian College (later Pine Hill Divinity Hall), he had been minister at Fort Massey Church, where for more than forty years Harry Dean was organist and choir master. At the initial meeting, it was “moved by R.M. Guilford, seconded by Mrs. H.P. Bezanson, to form a Society of such nature as indicated. Carried unanimously.” A committee was formed with the tasks of preparing a full list of graduates and of drafting a tentative constitution and by-laws.

A follow-up meeting was held on February 14, 1922, at which the draft constitution and by-laws were approved. Among the 16 people present, were Director Harry Dean, piano teacher Elsie Taylor, Mrs. Annie DesBrisay, Miss K. Inglis, and Miss Verna Blois, each of whom was to have a long connection with the Conservatory and the Association—fifty years later, almost to the day, violin teacher Jean Fraser reported to the Association Board that a generous donation had been received from Mrs. DesBrisay.

Further meetings of the fledgling society continued to be held throughout the spring. In April the Association decided to hold its first public function at the close of the term, and a banquet and recital were planned. As well, the first Annual General Meeting of the alumni society was held on June 12,



1922 in the Banquet Hall of the Green Lantern, the uppermost of the Barrington Street restaurant's four floors. This restaurant was housed for many years in the Keith Building, an "elaborate Romanesque Revival architectural styled building" designed by architect William Whitway and completed in 1896; the building is currently undergoing extension restoration. Although deceased by the time the Association was organized, Donald Keith (d. 1916), a furniture manufacturer and retailer, had for many years been a member of the Conservatory's Board of Governors. Mr. Fred M. Guilford, President of the Society (later Association) was elected as the Alumni Association's Representative to the Conservatory's Board of Governors. Fifteen new members joined the society the night of the banquet, bringing the total membership to 61.

Harry Dean proposed at the AGM that the Society develop plans to raise \$1000 to be used as a scholarship fund for Conservatory students. A variety of fund-raising projects were planned, including a Garden Party, a Musical Tea, a concert for alumni, and a recital with a guest artist, the earliest of a myriad of such endeavours that continue to this day. With enthusiasm such as this, it took only a few years to reach the initial target for the scholarship fund. This fund, invested and augmented substantially over the years, continues to be an important source of support for the many student awards offered by the MCPA Association.

In 2021/2022 the Association will celebrate its 100th year. An enthusiastic committee headed up by June Cook, a former President of the Association's Board of Directors, has already begun planning how we will celebrate this momentous milestone in the history of the organization.

Names by which the Association has been Known

Based on documents in the Association's Archives, since its founding in 1921-1922, the organization now known as the Maritime Conservatory of Performing Arts has been known by five different names.

- The Halifax Conservatory of Music Alumni Society [1921/2-1923]
- The Halifax Conservatory of Music Alumni Association [1923-1955]
- The Maritime Conservatory of Music Alumni Association [1955-1998]
- The Maritime Conservatory of Performing Arts Alumni Association [1998-2105]
- The Maritime Conservatory of Performing Arts Association [2015-present]

The Association Archives

Many of the sources for this historical issue of *The Score* are to be found in the archives maintained by the Association. The preservation, cataloguing, and storing of material related to the activities of the Association and the Conservatory over the decades since each was founded has been a priority for the MCPA Association for many years. An index of the extensive store of information in our archives may be found on the Conservatory's newly revised website, under the MCPA Association's section (<http://maritimeconservatory.com/about/mcpa-association/>).

If you have any material related to the Association or the Conservatory—minutes, financial reports, photographs, programmes for recitals or convocation, material such as news clippings related to former students, teachers, or Association members, for example—that you would be willing to donate, we would be delighted to receive it for inclusion in the Archives. The more material we have, the more useful the collection will be to an increasing range of people.

For further information, please contact the Association's Archivist and editor of *The Score*, Dr. Gary Brooks, 902-423-6040, gpbrooks@stfx.ca, MCPA Association, 6199 Chebucto Road, Halifax, NS, B3L 1K7.

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2. Halifax Ladies' College and Halifax Conservatory Building, 1996: Nova Scotia Museum Collection
3. Portrait of Richard John Uniacke, Jr., Uniacke Estate Museum
4. Halifax Club: McCord Museum, Montreal
5. Barrington Street Building as Army Hostel, 1942: E.A. Bollinger Nova Scotia Archives accession no. 1975-305 1942 no. 602c
6. Interior of St. Paul's Church, Halifax: Notman Studios, Nova Scotia Archives
7. The Academy of Music, Halifax:
<http://halifaxbloggers.ca/noticedinnovascotia/2014/10/halifax-album-gone-gone-gone-edition/>
8. Royal Conservatory of Music, Leipzig: 1896 engraving, in public domain
9. St. Matthew's Presbyterian Church: collection of Halifax Public Libraries
10. George Whitefield Chadwick: courtesy of *A Directory of Composers for Organ*
11. Dalhousie College, now the Forrest Building, Dalhousie University: Nova Scotia Museum Collection
12. Mr. Harry Dean, First Director of the Halifax Conservatory: courtesy of Fort Massey United Church, Halifax, NS
13. Interior of Forth Massey Church: courtesy of Forth Massey United Church, Halifax, NS.
14. Exterior of the Keith Building, "artist's drawing": by architect of the building William Whiteway
15. Entrance to the Green Lantern Restaurant, Barrington Street, Halifax: Nova Scotia Archives
16. Redevelopment proposal for the Keith/Green Lantern Building, Barrington Street, Halifax:
<http://www.metronews.ca/news/halifax/2015/08/07/development-proposed-for-halifax-s-historic-green-lantern-buildi.html>