

Elizabeth McMaster - A Canadian Hero



Introduction

Last year for my Heritage Fair project, I chose to do The Hospital for Sick Children (SickKids). I have a personal connection to the hospital since that's the place I go to when I'm ill. Since SickKids has been really my second home all my life, I thought why not do some research and get to know who was behind such a wonderful, life changing discovery? That person went by the name Elizabeth McMaster. So, today I would like to speak to you about this wonderful kind-hearted woman who was the founder of the #1 pediatric hospital in the world. I'll speak to you about her life before the hospital, and why I believe it is so incredible that a woman founded such a life changing place that continues to thrive and save lives today.

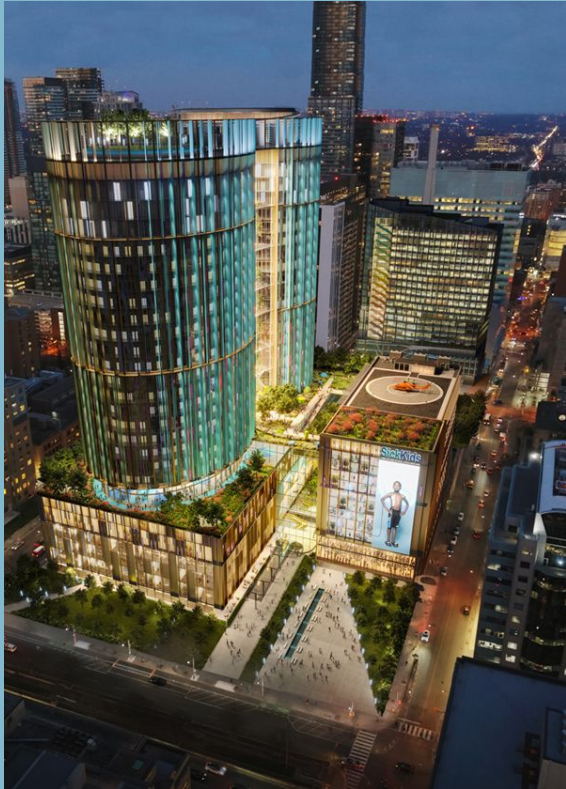


Who is Elizabeth McMaster?



- Elizabeth was born in Toronto in 1847. She was a very thoughtful and empathetic individual who just wanted the best for her community.
- She's the second child of George and Mary Wyllie who were Scottish immigrants who successfully moved and raised children in Toronto.
- Her mother Mary, was a woolen draper and dry good sales woman. She founded the business of Wyllie and Murray, and was also one of the first church wardens of St. Paul's Church in Toronto. As you will see later on in my presentation, Elizabeth quite evidently saw her mother as a significant role model and inspiration to found something of her own.

Why is Elizabeth McMaster so important to Canadian history?

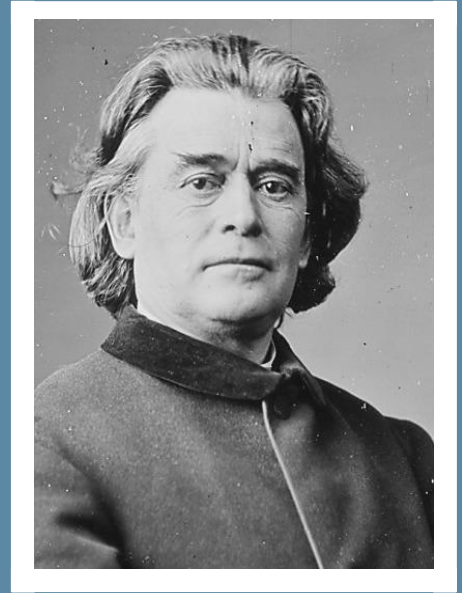


- Back when Elizabeth was roughly my age in 1860, women were not presumed to be leaders, to run things, even to be in control for that matter. So the fact the a Canadian woman during that time pushed that aside and founded such a large organization is absolutely incredible and this inspired me to learn more about her.
- Even though her discovery of SickKids was in 1875, it has evolved so much from then to now and absolutely none of what you see on the left side of the screen, would be possible without this leader of a woman.

Elizabeth's Life Before SickKids

In 1864, when Elizabeth was just 17 years of age, she got married to Samuel Fenton McMaster. He was a clerk in the McMaster wholesale dry goods business. The newly married couple spent some time in Manchester, England because the McMaster family had a branch of their business there. They had their daughter, Hope in Manchester and during their time there, Elizabeth visited a hospital for children and saw many children in need of attention from a doctor or nurse. She noticed that the majority of the workers were volunteers from around the community. Then, she thought...

- I love helping those in need
- My husband works for a family business
- My mother founded her own business
- Many kids in the hospital in Manchester aren't getting the medical attention they require
- If my daughter was ill and needed a doctor or nurses help, I'd hope somebody would help her



Samuel Fenton McMaster

All of these thoughts proved that Elizabeth should found a children's hospital so, that's what she did.

Why else did Elizabeth feel the need to discover SickKids

When Elizabeth was 28 years old in 1875, she came to the realization that in the 50 years previous to 1875, almost half of the recorded deaths in Toronto were those of children under 10.

She needed to do something about it and find a way to target her healthcare towards providing the best for these children.

On top of that, at the time, the only children's hospital in the British Empire was one called Ormond Street in London, England. She thought Canada should have the second one. Once she put her mind to it there was no stopping her and the people who worked alongside her had just as large of a passion for helping these kids as she did.

McMasters team of The Ladies Committee at SickKids

Yes, Elizabeth was both the founder of SickKids hospital and the main reason it thrives to be one of the best children's hospitals. But, without the help of The Ladies Committee, nowhere near as many children would have survived their illnesses.

The Ladies Committee consisted of several Toronto women who just like Elizabeth were “Very God-driven to do the work that they did at the hospital as they believed Bible teaching was as important as cleanliness and wholesome food.” (Judith Young) They played a big role in running the place as well as caring for all the sick children. They were all very loving and nurturing, and was very supportive of Elizabeth's hopes and dreams.



The Board of Trustees

McMaster was the president of The Ladies Committee and Chief Ministrator of HSC until 1889 and after that, she went off to Chicago to take a 2 year nurse training course.

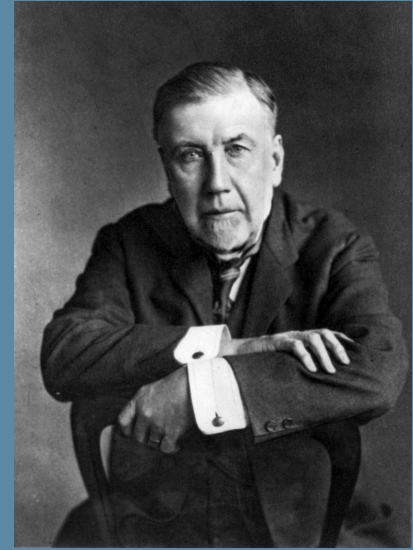
The hospital she returned to in 1891, was very different from the smooth running hospital that The Ladies Committee had very nicely under control.

The Board of Trustees wanted to switch to men managing the hospital. The job of the people on the Board of Trustees is to make good decisions to improve an organization so that it thrives but I don't think that's what Elizabeth thought was going on in this case.



Members on the Board of Trustees

A man who went by the name John Ross Robertson whose was the owner of the Toronto Telegram Newspaper, and was the Trustee Chairman highly recommended allowing men to manage the hospital. Elizabeth was not impressed with the chaos that happened whilst she was gone. She felt no need for a change and she wanted to keep everything as it was. She didn't want to give up something she worked so hard for. Problems arose with John and Elizabeth but she stood her ground and got her way.



Why I see Elizabeth as a role model

Elizabeth's father and husband passed away before she was 20. The reasons as to why is unknown but the fact that she still had the motivation and courage to run a hospital whilst dealing with both these significant deaths had to have been extremely difficult.

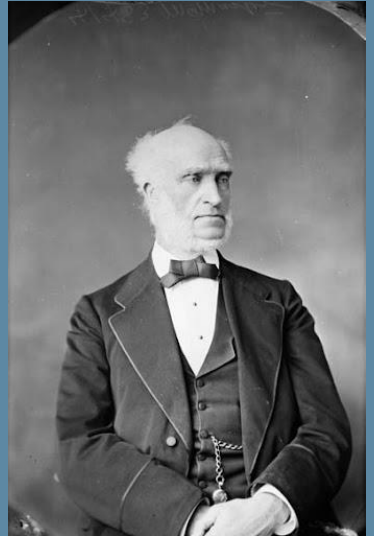
When I mentioned earlier about how Elizabeth would want somebody to care for her daughter if she was ill, that somebody ended up being Elizabeth. On December 18th, 1891, her daughter Hope got diphtheria. This disease can cause difficulty of breathing, heart rhythm problems, and sometimes it leads to death. Luckily in this case, her mothers founding of SickKids hospital saved the day, and quite frankly Hope's life, and she successfully recovered.

Elizabeth had to take care of her daughter by herself in the hospital since Samuel was now dead but she also had to do the same for every other patient in the hospital and I bet it was quite stressful for her but I truly admire her for how much perseverance and strength she had.

You may be wondering...

- Elizabeth died on March 3rd, 1903
- She was 55 years old when she died
- You were probably wondering if McMaster University or hospital was named after her. Unfortunately no but, McMaster University and McMaster Hospital, is named after Elizabeth's husband's uncle, William McMaster.

William was a businessman, politician, banker, and philanthropist. He was a strong believer on the importance of education. He became a wealthy man and decided to put that money towards a university which we now call McMaster University. From there McMaster Hospital was constructed.



Conclusion

As you can see from the statistics below, hundreds of thousands of people choose SickKids as their hospital. All 9,886 surgeries that took place at that hospital in 2022 alone, completely transformed the lives of each and every single one of those patients and their families. All those surgeries saved lives of young children who are yet to fulfill their purpose in the world. Without Elizabeth, who knows what would've happened to these children. Even though she isn't here with us any longer, she's the reason those children will grow to be adults, fulfill their purpose, and their destiny.

This is why I didn't just title my presentation "Elizabeth McMaster" but "Elizabeth McMaster - A Canadian Hero."

Stats from 2022

253,498

in-person visits

9,886

surgeries

45,566

emergency room visits

3,252

research papers

Resources

- *Biography – WYLLIE, ELIZABETH JENNET – Volume XIII (1901-1910) – Dictionary of Canadian Biography. (n.d.).*
http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/wyllie_elizabeth_jennet_13E.html
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