

George Leslie Mackay Centennial: The CTOT's Role

INTRODUCTION

Over the past two years the Canadian Trade Office in Taipei has been involved in the development of a number of projects celebrating the memory of Taiwan's most famous Canadian -- the pioneering missionary, medical worker and educator George Leslie Mackay (GLM). These projects resulted in a variety of events in 2001, beginning with the invitation in February of a team of Mackay scholars to give a series of **public lectures on GLM's legacy**, and culminating in a week-long series of activities timed to coincide with the 100th anniversary of his death on June 2. These events included an **international symposium**, the issue of a **commemorative postage stamp**, the naming of "**Mackay Day**" in **Tamshui Township**, a **photographic exhibition** at the Taiwan Museum, the opening of a major **exhibit by the Royal Ontario Museum** featuring Mackay's unique collection of Taiwanese artefacts. The museum exhibit, which ran until the end of September, was a real hit with the public and generated considerable media attention.

BACKGROUND

It is difficult for non-Taiwanese to imagine the importance of the legacy left by GLM. Mackay is a household name in Taiwan and held in universal esteem, but it is not generally known that he was Canadian. For the CTOT, our twin challenges in participating in the 100th anniversary were to highlight the fact that Mackay was Canadian, and to focus on those aspects of Mackay's contribution - medical science, education, and empowerment of Taiwan's aboriginal people -- that fit with our broader public affairs objectives.

Mackay landed in his "beloved Formosa" in 1871 and stayed there (with the exception of only two fundraising trips to Canada) for the next 30 years until his death. He is buried along with his Taiwanese wife and children in Tamshui -- not, it should be noted, in the foreigner's cemetery. The effect of his 30 years on Taiwanese society was immense. GLM established a Presbyterian presence on the island, founding more than 60 churches, creating a new "bi-cultural community" that -- though small in number -- influenced Taiwan's development in the 20th Century. The Presbyterian Church is historically associated with local Taiwanese (as contrasted with Chinese) culture. Therefore, a disproportionate share of the current DPP leadership is Presbyterian educated. And, while Presbyterians account for a tiny percentage of the total population, they are a large percentage of Taiwan's aboriginal peoples, who have historically used the church as a shield against cultural and linguistic assimilation by Taiwan's Japanese and Chinese rulers.

As part of his missionary work, Mackay set up a medical clinic in Tamshui where he lived, providing one of the first glimpses of western medicine on the island, and contributing greatly to the modernization of medicine in Taiwan. Today, the Mackay Memorial Hospital in Taipei provides a living testament to those pioneering efforts.

In the field of education, GLM was no less prolific. He established the first school for girls in Taiwan, and in 1882 he opened Oxford College (named after Oxford, Ontario) with funds he raised in Canada. These schools, located in Tamshui, have since become the Tamkang High School and Aletheia University respectively, both of which continue to educate new generations of Taiwanese students, including former President Lee Teng-hui.

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