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## National Championships to Debate Iconic Canadian's Place in History



As St. Patrick's Day approaches, it is perhaps appropriate for the general public to remember an Irish Canadian issue that still resonates. At the Canadian National Debating Championships in Montreal on Thursday, April 26, some of Canada's finest young minds will take on a question that has perplexed historians for over a century: *"Should Thomas D'Arcy McGee – the famously outspoken nineteenth-century Member of Parliament for Montreal West and only 19th century Canadian politician to be assassinated – be considered a Canadian hero?"* David Wilson, author of the definitive and critically acclaimed two volume biography of *Thomas D'Arcy McGee* (McGill-Queen's Press) and a Representative from the Irish Embassy in Ottawa will be on hand to judge the debates.

McGee was one of the first advocates for a nation-wide railway and for the political unity of Canada, both of which forever changed the separate colonies of British North America. He advocated a 'new nationality' that would bring together all of the many ethnic and religious groups in Canada – a sentiment that still matters today. Yet McGee's contributions to Canadian life and history are often overshadowed by the controversy he stirred up amongst his fellow Irish nationalists – he was expelled by the Montreal St. Patrick's Society – and by his violent murder at the hands of a Fenian sympathizer.

Over 80,000 people lined the streets of Montreal for McGee's funeral. This was Canada's first state funeral massively attended because the new Grand Trunk Railway, that McGee had championed, organized cheap excursions from all over its vast network. Who killed McGee is still hotly debated.

Exactly 150 years later, Thomas D'Arcy McGee's legacy may finally find a permanent place in the annals of Irish Canadians. David Wilson challenged the Montreal St. Patrick's Society to reinstate McGee. The St. Patrick's Society has taken up the issue and will discuss it this year. Canadian history lives.

**Sam Allison** is Vice Chair of the Jeanie Johnstone Educational Foundation which brought the topic to the Quebec Student Debating Association.

For more information about the **Canadian National Debate Championship** : see [www.nationals2012.ca](http://www.nationals2012.ca) or contact the organizers Chris George and Greg Louden–

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For more information about ***Thomas D’Arcy McGee, Vols 1 & 2***, or to set up an interview with David Wilson, contact:

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