

# Alexander MacKenzie Endowment Fund a unique piece of history

Garit Reid with files from Marian Zinn Lucknow Sentinel

The Alexander MacKenzie Education Endowment Fund is an award that has been shrouded in mystery and with quite a unique history as it is an award that is only given to boys from a man who thought all women did was graduate and then got married.

The endowment fund is given out to PE Madill Secondary School boys who reside in the Lucknow or the former townships of Culross, Kinloss and Huron in Bruce County or the former townships of East Wawanosh, West Wawanosh and Ashfield in Huron County. The student with the highest mark in these regards is bestowed the award.

Some of the mystery behind the award, which was set up in 1943 after the death of MacKenzie who put a trust fund in place stipulating the endowment fund and its details. The reason the award is still only given to boys is because when a trust is set up through a will such as Mackenzie's, it cannot be altered said Scotia Bank media Contact Andrew Chornenky. Scotia Bank (Kitchener) is the current executor of the endowment fund.

Chornenky added that there is currently \$85,000 in the fund, but

has no prior knowledge of who looked after the will before 1996 as he said Scotia Bank took over the trust when Scotia Bank bank acquired National Trust in that year.

Here is an excerpt from the Kinloss history book on the interesting, but peculiar life of Alexander MacKenzie:

"Alexander MacKenzie told a neighbour that he made his money working in Detroit and when he came back to Ontario he did not want to appear wealthy so he dressed poorly... Upon his death he had accumulated an estate of \$110,000. In his will he left two nieces and a nephew, who had seen to his needs, each \$5,000 and \$5,000 to South Kinloss Church. Approximately \$80,000 was left to establish an educational endowment fund for the purpose of assisting worthy and promising young men who has been students at the Lucknow High School to further their education... Alex MacKenzie only believed in education for boys - girls just got married and didn't do anything."

The Alexander MacKenzie Endowment Fund is still in existence today and still providing young men, not young women the ability to further their education.

Excerpt from *Before the Age of Miracles: Memoirs of a Country Doctor* by William Victor Johnston (M.D. Fitzhenry & Whiteside Ltd, 1972):

When Alex MacKenzie made his Will, the estate had shrunk from a high of \$125,000 to \$100,000 due to the operations of the Farmer's Credit Arrangements Act. This act during the depression of the early 1930s-the so-called dirty 30s-dramatically scaled down the mortgages of many farmers, including a few held by Alex. Nevertheless, there was \$60,000 left for the High School Students' Loan Fund. Immediately after his death in April 1943 some of the surviving relatives set out to break the Will on the grounds of mental incompetence. They had no difficulty mustering dozens of witnesses to prove the confusion and forgetfulness of his later years. The hearing was before a trial judge without a jury in the Surrogate Court of the County of Bruce.

The judge found that Alex lacked testamentary capacity. It was then taken to the Ontario Court of Appeal, which reversed the judge's decision. Finally, it was reviewed by the Chief Justices of the Supreme Court of Canada who upheld the Will.

Memories from local resident

and historian Marian Zinn

As a teenager in the early 1940s, I can vividly recall Alex MacKenzie alias Leggy/greasy Alex walking on a cold windy November day, with the sleet blowing against this face. Clothed in an old overcoat, overalls, rubber boots and a cloth cap pulled down over his ears. A man of small stature was often seen walking in front of my parents' farm. Alex always carried a blue five-pound honey pail, in which would contain various amounts of cash, the proceeds from the interest and principal from the many mortgages he held on farms in the township.

He frequented the Bank of Montreal, Lucknow. The tellers never enjoyed waiting on Dirty-Alex, especially the Bank secretary who needed to help him get into his safety deposit box in the bank vault. No cans of air freshener in those days.

No doubt the last will and testament was drawn in the bank manager's office the estate to establish an endowment fund for the purpose of assisting worthy and promising young men from the Lucknow high school to further their education. Women just got married and didn't do anything.

The executors were George Smith and David Carruthers, Dr. and

Norman Vincent Prest witnessed their signatures. In May 1943 after a night's search the body of Norman Prest was found on Canning St. West, along a fence in Ashfield township. He had swallowed lye. The Head Teller (who is still living) received a shock when her fiancé told her before she entered the bank the next morning.

A number of men in this area, told me who borrowed money from this fund would never have been able to further their education. Some of these students never paid back the money.

The Fund has gone from Lucknow High School then to Wingham in 1967 and in 1970 to the Huron county board of education and then to Avon Maitland School board

The sequel to this story is if Alex had been born 50 years later he would have been hard pressed to find a man to take care of him. Many professional women would have surrounded him:

Dr. Cathy, dentist; Mary Lou, a barber; Lynn, a lawyer; Donna, bank manager;

Ann, medical doctor; Dionne, pharmacist; Joan, funeral director; Peggy, minister; and Jessica, tractor driver with back hoe to dig his grave.