

Rev. Dr. George William Kerby and Emily Spencer Kerby, Calgary pioneers, Loyalist descendents

The Calgary Branch of the UELAC was formed on February 28, 1928. Meetings were held at the Board of Trade building in Calgary. Original membership fees were \$1. Initially the branch may have operated separately from the UELAC.¹

The first slate of officers included²:

Honourary Presidents: Lt. General Sir Archibald Campbell Macdonell and Hon. Richard Bedford Bennett.

President: Lewis Frederick Clarry K.C.

First vice-president: Dr. George William Kerby

Second vice-president: Mrs. M. L. Bowen

Treasurer: Mr. Arthur Maybee

Secretary: Miss A. E. Freeland

Council: Mrs. Dauncy, Mrs. Bullough, Mr. Fowler, Mr. Patrick, Mr. Clifford Jones K.C.

Information on the meeting in May 1928 was published in the Calgary Herald along with the list of 125 members who attended.³



Figure 1: Emily Spencer Kerby⁴

Figure 2: Rev. Dr. George Kerby⁵

The most well known of these officers, besides the Honourary presidents is the First vice-president, Dr. G. W. Kerby.

Dr. Kerby was the founding principal of Mount Royal College which opened in 1911 at the NE corner of 7th Ave and 11 St SW. The Kerby Memorial Building and Dr. G. D. Stanley gym opened in 1949 and was expanded in 1961. Mount Royal College moved to the Lincoln Park campus in 1972. A seniors' organization started using the empty building in 1973 shortly after the college moved. The building is now called the Kerby Centre, along with the Seniors' organization using it. Over the years 1920 to 1944, Dr. Kerby and his wife Emily lived in a house

which was located in the current parking lot of the Kerby Centre. There is a plaque summarizing George and Emily's life located outside the Kerby Centre.

Figure 3: Kerby House in 1966⁶



George William Kerby was born in the later part of 1860 in the sub district of Sombra in the County of Lambton, Ontario⁵. Sombra is an unincorporated village situated on the St. Clair River just south of Sarnia⁷. His parents were Nelson Kerby and Hester Ann Sheply.⁸ Nelson Kerby was a farmer.⁹ A sister, Mary was born about a year after George.⁹

George spent his youth working on the family farm.⁶ By 1881, he was away from his home attending school.¹⁰ He graduated from Victoria University, the Methodist college of the University of Toronto in 1888 and was ordained as a Methodist minister shortly after. During his schooling, he also served as a probationary missionary in various parts of Ontario.⁶

On 11 October 1888, after his graduation, George married Emily Spencer in Paris, Ontario,⁸ which is located on the Nith River near Brantford, Ontario. They likely met in Paris in 1886 when Emily taught at the public school there and George went there as a student supply preacher. Emily was born on 26 March 1860 in Toronto as the fourth daughter of Sarah Lafferty and James Spencer, who was a Methodist minister.⁴ Her father died shortly after her birth since her mother is listed in the 1871 census as a widow with four children aged 20 to 9 years.¹¹

George's initial assignment after ordination was to the Dundas Street Methodist Church in Woodstock, Ontario. He had subsequent pastorates in Hamilton, St. Catharines, Brantford and Montreal. He also travelled across Canada twice as a missionary. He was frequently in demand since he was an eloquent speaker.⁴

A son and a daughter were born in 1893 and 1895 respectively.^{4,12,13}

During 1901 to 1902, George evangelized throughout Canada and the United States. During this time Emily remained in Ontario and raised the children. In 1902 a telegram was sent from Calgary requesting George to travel west and become minister of Central Methodist Church. The Kerbys' moved west in July 1903 to settle in the still small Calgary. This invitation was accepted opposed to many others from well established churches in eastern Canada. One of George's eastern colleagues wrote "Kerby's gone to that God forsaken place and will never be heard from again."⁶

Until 1910, George was minister at Central Methodist Church. He oversaw the building of the sandstone church which opened on the 5th February 1905. This church today is the Central United Church located at 131 7th Ave.

SW. Hon. R. B. Bennett helped choose the plot of land.¹⁴ The congregation swelled due to his eloquence and passion. On arrival in Calgary, Emily used her organizational skills to raise funds to create a Calgary YMCA. In 1910 her efforts were realized with the founding of the Calgary YMCA.⁴

Meanwhile George became the founding principal of the newly formed Mount Royal College. The college started as a Methodist based institution, financed by Methodists' Alberta Conference and General Council. Emily was one of the College's first teachers. She was described as being a joint principal with George during the early years of the college.⁴

George continued as the Principal for the following 31 years. He oversaw the college becoming a liberal cultural education institution for both genders using his dynamic leadership. His plans for the opening of Mount Royal were gathered during tours of over 65 colleges and universities in Canada and United States. During George's tenure, the college started a partnership with the University of Alberta to deliver transfer courses. Over the same time George was also active with many community organizations, of which the Loyalists was one.⁶

Emily was articulate and gifted and she used these attributes to openly castigate the church establishment. From 1914 to 1928 she published articles and letter criticizing the slow acceptance of women for ministry. Through the Calgary Local Council of Women, Emily joined or led campaigns for higher age of consent to marriage, women's education, labour reforms, mothers' pension, protection of children, birth control, sex education and provincial legislation for sterilization of "mental defectives". On 10 October 1914, Emily along with two others presented a province wide petition for suffrage to the Alberta government of Arthur Sifton. During the 1930s she wrote many articles for magazines and newspapers under pseudonyms.⁴

Service during WW1 included working in the central offices of the Red Cross in Calgary for Emily and serving as chief recruiting officer of Military District No. 13 for George. Their son Harold Spencer Kerby entered the Royal Naval Air Service in 1915 and went on to a distinguished career in the Royal Air Force.⁶

In 1935 Emily explained what would happen if men continued to push women back into the kitchen by saying "Some fine morning you will ... wonder what has occurred. It will only be our educated, efficient, twentieth century women showing their ability to shove. You may call it the woman's revolution if you like. It will be bloodless, but it will hit your silver and gold hard."



Emily Spencer Kerby suffered a heart attack and died on 3 October 1938 at the age of 78. Prominent members of the United Church and the Anglican bishop of Calgary joined over a thousand people who gathered to pay

tribute at her funeral.⁴ She is buried at Burnsland Cemetery in Calgary in section C.¹⁵ She died 9 days short of their 50th wedding anniversary.⁴

In the years following Emily's death, George was awarded honorary degrees from University of Alberta and University of Victoria. He also served as Honourary Lieutenant Colonel and Honourary Chaplin during the opening years of WWII.⁶

George Kerby died in 1944. He is also buried at Burnsland Cemetery in section C.¹⁶

A biography of Emily is part of volume XVI of the Dictionary of Canadian Biographies. One for George is not currently available but should be included with the work on volume XVII.¹⁷

Both parents of George⁶ and Emily Kerby⁴ are said to be of Loyalist descent. As far as I know this is not proven. Prior to 1971 proof was not required to be deemed eligible to use the initials UE. Certificates were issued, but they did not have the ancestor's name on them.

There was a Loyalist, Robert Spencer who lived in the Home District which includes the Toronto and Niagara areas.¹⁸

There is a Zebulon Shippy included in the Loyalist Directory who lived in the Niagara region.¹⁹

Lafferty²⁰ and Kerby²¹ are not listed in the Loyalist directory although there are some entries for 'Kerr'. However Mrs. Elizabeth Kerr from the Home District is listed as expunged. There are two listings for 'Kirby' but they are also expunged.

George Kerby's parents are probably third generation in Canada. Emily Spencer's parents are probably second generation in Canada. More work is required to confirm the Loyalist connection of George and Emily Kerby.