



Philip S. Ross



Philip S. Ross was born in 1827 in Belfast, Ireland, where his father was posted to an infantry regiment that had seen service during the Battle of Waterloo 12 years earlier. In 1832, the Ross family returned to their ancestral home of Glasgow, Scotland, where his father became a bookkeeper. Philip Ross must have been a patriotic Scot — in later years he would often insist, “Notwithstanding the accident of my birth in Ireland, I am a Scotsman.”

Little is known of his educational background, but by the late 1840s, he had followed his father into bookkeeping. He worked at the Monkland Iron and Steel Company of Airdrie, near Glasgow.

In 1851, seeking broader opportunities, he set sail for Canada. After a couple of short-term assignments, he obtained a more permanent bookkeeping position with a large shipyard in Montreal that manufactured wooden hulls and steamship engines. With his employment secured, he was ready for marriage; wanting a Scottish wife, he — according to family lore — wrote to his church minister in Scotland, giving the names of three young ladies with whom he was acquainted, and asking the minister to enquire whether any of them would marry him. This enquiry bore fruit, and in 1856, Christina Chalmers Dansken crossed the Atlantic, and they were married. Their union was blessed with five sons and three daughters.

In 1858, Ross made a dramatic career change: he left the shipyard and established his own business — a ship chandlery, supplying sail canvas, paints and grain bags to ships, and serving as an accountant “balancing books, winding up estates, passing goods through the Custom House for duty or on bond and the trans-shipment at this port of goods destined for other places in Canada.” In due course two brothers who had followed him from Scotland took over the chandlery business, allowing him to take advantage of the Dominion Insolvents Acts of the 1860s and 1870s under which official assignees were appointed, with Ross being the first official assignee in Canada. In 1879, he established P. S. Ross & Sons to carry on the accounting business with two of his sons, James G. Ross and William G. Ross; he also took steps towards the founding of the first professional accounting body. According to The Canadian Business Hall of Fame:

Philip S. Ross could be called one of the Fathers of Accounting in North America. When Scotsman Philip Ross settled in Montreal in 1858, accounting was so new to Canada that only two other accountants were listed in the Montreal directory...

In 1879, Ross and his friend James Court gathered 11 other accountants in Montreal’s Mechanics Hall. The group determined to bring order to the profession by forming an association and seeking a charter that would allow them to restrict the use of the term ‘chartered accountant.’ On July 24, 1880, the group created the first accounting society in North America. Ross served as its President from 1883 to 1896...

Not only did Ross contribute greatly to the field of accounting, he dedicated much of his life to serving his community. He established the Montreal Sailors' Institute to provide entertainment and assistance to sailors. So sincere was his dedication to the Institute that when it was facing financial failure, Ross paid off all the group's debt out of his own pocket.

The accounting society referred to here was the antecedent of The Institute of Chartered Accountants of Quebec. It was actually the world's second professional accounting body, the first being The Institute of Chartered Accountants of Scotland, in 1854.

Early clients that have remained with the Ross firm since the 1880s include Bell Telephone Company of Canada and The Sun Life Insurance Company of Canada. In those days there were no professional standards for auditing procedures or for drafting the auditor's report. In the auditor's report to the President and Directors of Sun Life for the year ended December 31, 1875, Ross simply reported it as he saw it, using wording that today seems almost quaint. The report comprising six paragraphs, the second and sixth paragraphs stated:

I have also given a most searching and exhaustive examination of the Cash Book, or as it is called the Cash Book Journal, comparing all the Disbursements with the vouchers for them.

Having gone through all this investigation in a thorough manner it affords me much pleasure in stating that the books are kept in a more correct manner than I usually find books to be which I have been requested to audit. The entries are carefully and correctly made. I am sure that it will give you as much satisfaction as it does me to have this stated.

In 1895, at the age of 68, Ross began to withdraw from the operations of the firm. A devout Presbyterian, he supported an array of civic activities and religious organizations, providing his services at no charge to the latter bodies.

Ross certainly established a singular dynasty. Sons who followed him into the firm included James G., taking charge of day-to-day operations in the mid-1890s, and Alexander F. C., participating in the founding of the Dominion Association of Chartered Accountants in 1902, becoming first its Treasurer, and then its President. Another son, John W., was Alexander's twin; he in turn had a son, Howard I. Ross, who served as Chair of the firm's Policy Board in the 1960s, was President of the Institutes of Chartered Accountants of both Quebec (1958–59) and Canada (1963–64), and became a noted author of accounting-related books.

The firm went through several name changes over the years. From P. S. Ross & Sons it became Touche Ross & Co. in 1958, after a merger with George A. Touche & Co. (a UK firm which had expanded to Canada, the US and certain other countries). Variations on that name followed until 1990, when it became Deloitte & Touche, following a world-wide merger with Deloitte.

Philip S. Ross died in 1907, at age 80.