Preface

The Dead Sea Scrolls, as you all know, are so called because they are not dead, they do not come from the sea, and not every one of the documents is a scroll. Otherwise the title is correct.

From the very day they came to light in 1947, the Scrolls have been the object of considerable scholarly opinion and controversy, and for over half that period they have fascinated the non-scholarly world also. Certainly no other archaeological or inscriptive find of the past century has evoked wider interest in relation to the Hebrew Bible, early Christianity, and Jewish sectarianism.

Harry Orlinsky

The McGill University archives in Montreal, Quebec, are more than 8,000 kilometres from the caves overlooking the Dead Sea between Israel and Jordan. There 2,000-year-old fragments – primarily on parchment and related to early Judaism – were discovered in the middle of the twentieth century. A cache of documents found in Canada a half century later demonstrates that the distance is not quite as great as it might first appear. The university archives contain the records of a rarely discussed series of events that meant that for nearly a decade McGill University owned the largest collection of Dead Sea Scrolls material outside the collections of the Government of Jordan in Jerusalem. This book relates the story of that purchase.

The book is divided into two parts. Part I recounts and contextualizes the history of McGill University’s purchase as presented in the R.B.Y. Scott Papers found in the McGill University archives. Chapter 1 acts as a general introduction, while chapters 2 and 3 are devoted to the reconstruction of the story of McGill’s purchase of the scrolls. These two chapters contextualize the purchase within the broader historical and institutional environment. Chapter 4, which concludes the first part of the volume, explores the significance of the scrolls purchase for the current discourse on the ownership of national and cultural treasures.
All chapters refer amply to the correspondence in the Scott Papers and other archival sources consulted to complement the narrative. It should be noted that, to facilitate reading, foreign language correspondence is quoted in translation. We prepared these translations ourselves and helpful colleagues edited them. The original language text is transcribed in Part II.

The second part of this book consists of a collection of the transcriptions of more than a hundred documents from the archives of McGill University and the archives of the Israel Antiquities Authority (IAA). The material from the McGill University archives (primarily the hitherto unpublished R.B.Y. Scott Papers) was supplemented by archival records stored and accessed in the basement of the McGill Faculty of Religious Studies, kindly put at our disposal by then-dean, B. Barry Levy. Part II provides the reader with as much of the related primary documentation as necessary to reconstruct this history. Excluded from the published collection are letters from individuals whose literary heirs could not be located to grant permission for publication and letters from institutions where bureaucracy or other factors prevented the granting of permission. Fewer than twenty documents were excluded and in most cases they are described in the body of the text or in the notes to the included documents. Following completion of this manuscript a handful of letters relating to McGill’s purchase were discovered in the collection of the archives of the United Church of Canada. The contents of this correspondence have been incorporated into the narrative in the first part of this volume but transcriptions are not included in the second part because of difficulties related to acquiring copyright permission. The letters and other documentation included here are provided in chronological sequence and numbered individually. To facilitate access, the individual records, when cited in the first part of the book, are referred to in the notes by the surnames of the correspondents, the date, and the assigned number of the document. Thus, for example, Harding to Scott, 3 October 1953, Letter #3. Archival lot numbers are not indicated in the notes to Part I but are identified clearly with the text of the transcribed letters in Part II.

As mentioned, the documents transcribed have been heavily annotated to facilitate reading. The notes include biographical information on the correspondents and people identified in the texts, descriptions of locations mentioned, background information on events described, and bibliographic references for articles and books referred to. As a result the letters can be read in or out of sequence without great difficulty, but this has led to some unavoidable repetition between the notes to Part I and Part II.
Abbreviations are avoided as much as possible. The *sbl Handbook of Style* was our source of reference when the abbreviation of a term or name was deemed appropriate. Where the spelling of names of people and institutions in sources varied, we adopted the *Encyclopedia of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, as far as possible, as a guideline.