

*McMaster University, The Toronto Years*, Vol. I by Charles M. Johnston, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1976, 295 pp.

The embryo of an institution, like that of a human being or a nation, is usually conceived with great joy and anticipation. However, its birth and initial development are also commonly accompanied by varying degrees of trauma. Professor Johnston's comprehensive and fascinating story of the launching and early progression of McMaster University proves that here is no exception to the general rule. We are led step by detailed step through the days when its precursor, the Canadian Literary Institute, first opened its doors in Woodstock, Ontario, in 1857, through the harrowing years after the university was established in Toronto, an interlude fraught with unbelievable acrimony and insecurity (both monetary and moral), up to the eve of the eagerly awaited removal from its home on Bloor Street in Toronto to its final resting place in Hamilton. Volume II will concern itself with events after 1930 to the present. When concluded, Professor Johnston's work will represent an invaluable addition to the ongoing collective history of Canadian universities, and it will also be of immense interest to the Baptist denomination whose early leaders conceived of the idea of McMaster, brought it to life, and fought the long and hard battle to sustain it.

The main purpose of McMaster was to provide a sound academic training ground for Baptist clergy, its secular curriculum being a secondary consideration. The first Baptist seminary, the Canada Baptist College, was founded in Montreal in 1838 by John Gilmour who was concerned that so many young Canadian Baptist pastors remained in the United States after their theological training. This was a problem close to the heart of many Canadian university heads at the time, and the lure of the 'greener fields' across the border was a continuing fact to be faced by the academic community in Canada for some decades to come. The Canada Baptist College died in 1849, a victim of financial deprivation and of internal doctrinal dissent, the latter 'disease' being endemic to Baptist educational enterprises. Less than a decade later, in 1857, the Rev. R. Fyfe, a British-American from Laprairie, Quebec, founded a second Baptist institution in Woodstock, Ontario, which was intended to serve students of any denomination from anywhere in Canada. Fyfe's Canadian Literary Institute, renamed Woodstock College in 1883, "combined coeducational grammar school training with theological instruction for prospective Baptist pastors." True to Baptist tradition, Woodstock was dedicated to the concept of complete separation of church and state and would accept no government support. Therefore it depended entirely on the beneficence of the several congregations, a policy which left it at the mercy of the individual congregational whims and prejudices. Hence, like its forerunner in Montreal, it suffered and eventually succumbed to the wounds of internal wrangling over such issues as modernist versus fundamentalist interpretations of scripture, or the relative merits of the university-trained pastor and the pure seminary graduate. However, the controversy which finally brought about the resolve to found an entirely separate institution in Toronto was between those who were either for or against the motion of secular education being mixed with religious studies. Those not in favour withdrew their support from Woodstock, leaving it to hobble along with insufficient funds to enable it to maintain acceptable academic standards. By 1926 it went down to final defeat.

It was the wealthy entrepreneur and senator, William McMaster, who lent both his fortune

and his name to the new institution which received its charter from the Ontario provincial legislature in 1887. Senator McMaster presented the university “as a trust to all the churches in that constituency,” and the Baptist Convention accepted “full responsibility for the new university’s affairs.” Johnston’s purpose in writing the history of McMaster was “to explain and assess the principles and ideals that shaped . . . (the University, and to examine how it discharged its obligations to the Baptist constituency and to society at large.” In so doing he describes in colourful detail the several hurdles which had to be surmounted as a result of stubborn refusal to federate with the neighbouring University of Toronto, a move seen by many as the ideal solution to recurring financial crises. In addition, the interdependence between the Baptist denomination of central Canada “and its counterparts in the Atlantic world,” is well defined – “a relationship which frequently stood McMaster in good stead when it came to setting goals and recruiting personnel.” Highlighted also is the agonizing conflict over doctrinal issues, particularly with respect to the opposing forces of modernist and fundamentalist views.

No one who figures large or small in the trying formative years is ignored and the actions of the main characters, the irrepressible adversaries Elmore Harris and T. T. Shields; the dignified and sorely-tried Chancellor Whidden; the radical protagonists Professors I. G. Matthews and G. Cross, *et al.*, are all drawn with intense precision. The tensions arising from the polarities of vision regarding Baptist tenets of faith make a surprisingly gripping story. As Johnston states, “In public . . . (McMaster) professed to be a liberal, almost non-denominational Christian university; in private, every effort was being made to preserve its distinctive Baptist flavour.” A disillusioned McMaster alumnus teaching physics at Western in 1926 is reported as saying: “Denominational educational work seems to be so handicapped by the religious prejudices of the ignorant, members of our denomination, that I have often questioned the advisability of so-called religious institutions. . . . A higher and better grade of morality in some important respects is being propagated from the more scientific institutions under State support.”

The administration and the majority of the faculty were determined to belie accusations of McMaster being merely ‘a selfish little denominational project, smelling of musty medieval ecclesiasticism,’ or just ‘a little school for Baptists,’ and to proclaim that men of quality and vision were attracted to it because ‘it stands for something.’ Nevertheless, repeatedly it was attacked by the fundamentalists as being heretical and highly unorthodox in its teachings; repeatedly the questions were raised: why keep up a large Baptist university when the well-established University of Toronto was on the door-step? – why not concentrate all available resources on developing a reputable theological institution? These and other vexing issues continuously racked McMaster throughout the early part of the 20th century, often threatening its very existence. But towards the end of the second decade the main detractors were vanquished; the decision was made to relocate the university in Hamilton thereby escaping from the shadow of the University of Toronto and also from the temptations and vices of that wicked city; the campaign to raise the necessary funds was well under way; and the university prepared itself for “a fresh start.”

A gnawing fear lurking in the minds of many loyal supporters, including Chancellor Whidden’s, was that the move would see the university eventually converted from “a christian institution” into “a municipal or regional university.” Towards the end of the bitter years of strife, Whidden had begun to question his own conviction that the vitriolic attacks

of Harris and Shields on the modernist leanings of certain faculty, and their insistence that such heresies were changing McMaster into a godless place with an heretical, or at best a confused and doubting, student body, were, in reality, wrongly conceived. Did they perhaps have some validity, some substance? On the surface, at least, he convinced himself that such doubts were groundless. There was no reason why McMaster need go down that treacherous path; nor was there any concrete evidence that students had been led astray by their academic experience there. In any case, on October 17, 1927, the proposal to move to Hamilton was formally accepted and “the way was now clear, after six years of chequered negotiations and lengthy consultation for the relocation of the university.”

The die was cast and the justification for Whidden’s convictions, or the validity of the basis for his inner disquiet would soon be put to the test, the outcome of which will be described in Volume II of Professor Johnston’s history of McMaster. There is every reason to await its publication with keen anticipation.

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*A Commitment to Excellence.* Report of a Task Force on Graduate Studies and Research in the Humanities and Social Sciences. Kingston, Queen’s University, 1975, pp. 104.

In 1974, the Canada Council established a Commission on Graduate Studies in the Humanities and Social Sciences and one of the first actions of the Commission was to request eight universities to set up task forces to study some of the questions it had been invited to examine. At Queen’s University seven faculty members and one graduate student constituted such a group and this is their report.

It contains nine chapters. Four of them cover topics which all studies of graduate work touch upon: the purposes of graduate education, the design and structure of graduate programs, the financing of graduate students, and basic research within the university. Two others deal specifically with the role of the Canada Council – one in graduate education and the other as a sponsor of university research. There are 48 recommendations interspersed throughout the volume which might have been more usefully collected at the beginning or the end of the report.

The text itself really contains very little that has not been said before in a number of recent publications, in particular the 1972 report of the AUCC (Bonneau-Corry) Commission *Quest for the Optimum* (to which, however, the report makes no reference) and what is said is often disappointing.

Despite the claim that “graduate education and research seem to have lost sight of the purposes for which they are growing,” there is little to enlighten the reader on this point. The brief discussion on the purposes of graduate education omits many of the reasons why graduate work is prosecuted (or was even started) in Canada. Could it be because some of these reasons would show that universities, like other man-made institutions, have feet of clay? – or that they are not fashioned on Humboldt’s ideal? The authors make much of their view that there should be the “firmest resistance to efforts at ‘vocationalizing’ the Ph.D..”