



<http://www.ucalgary.ca/hic> • ISSN 1492-7810  
2005 • Vol. 5, No. 1

**Friedland, Martin L. *The University of Toronto: A History*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002. Pp. xiii + 764; illus. CDN\$63.00 (cloth). ISBN: 0-8020-4429-8.**

**Reviewed by R. Douglas Francis, University of Calgary**

Martin Friedland's history of the University of Toronto is an impressive *tour de force*. Over seven hundred pages in length and close to thirty pages of endnotes and bibliography, it provides a comprehensive, highly readable, and richly illustrated history of the flagship university in Canada. The author is to be congratulated for a challenging task that is well done. The book succeeds in showing how the institution evolved from a small religious college in 1827 to the large multi-university of today. The road it followed was not always straight nor upward, but strewn with pitfalls and wrong turns.

Bishop John Strachan was responsible for the beginning of the University of Toronto, although the institution from the beginning did not evolve according to his plan. Strachan wanted to establish a university that would be a religious-based institution under the tutelage of the Church of England. His plan was to use endowed land, set aside by Lord Simcoe, the first Governor of Upper Canada, in the 1790s, to establish the province's first university. He intended to use the institution to train clergy for the Anglican Church in the new colony of Upper Canada, thus reinforcing its religious tone, its link to the mother country, and its distancing from the United States – all issues of uppermost concern for the loyal Strachan. He set sail for England, where on 15 March 1827, he received the royal charter “for the establishment of a College . . . for the education of youth in the principles of the Christian Religion, and for their instruction in the various branches of Science and Literature. . . at or near our town of York . . . to continue for ever, to be called ‘King’s College’” (8). The President was to be the archdeacon of York, who happened to be Strachan himself, and all professors were to adhere to the Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion of the Church of England.

Strachan's determination to link the University to the Church of England began a controversy that plagued the university throughout its early years. Upper Canada was not a solid Anglican colony; there were other denominations – most notably the Methodists, Presbyterians, and Catholics – who resented this new university being an Anglican reserve, and began to build their own religious colleges to compete with King's College. They demanded

their share of land set aside in the colony, known as the "Clergy Reserves," to be used for educational purposes. The wording of the "Clergy Reserves" was for land to be set aside for the promotion of the Protestant faith. Strachan assumed that "Protestant" was synonymous with "Anglican," but of course the other Protestant denominations challenged and won the right to a portion of the Reserves for the establishment of their religious institutions. Strachan also ran into opposition from the government of Upper Canada and his own Board of Governors who wanted to hire faculty members regardless of their religious faith. Then in 1849, Robert Baldwin introduced a bill into the parliament of the province of the United Canadas to convert King's College into the University of Toronto, turning the institution into a secularized university. Rebuffed by his efforts to establish an Anglican university, Strachan immediately began organizing a campaign to raise funds to establish a new Church of England institution, Trinity College. It came to fruition in early 1852. It would not be until after the turn of the century that it would affiliate with the University of Toronto.

The possibility was now open for the other denominational colleges to affiliate. St. Michael's (Catholic) joined in 1881, Knox (Presbyterian) and Wycliffe (Low Anglican) in 1885, and Victoria College (Methodist) in 1890. Queen's University (Presbyterian) remained independent in its present location of Kingston, while McMaster (Baptist) was originally in Toronto, but moved to Hamilton in 1930. To reinforce the secular nature of the University, King's College was replaced by University College, which would have no religious tests associated with it. Initially University College, the University of Toronto's teaching college, was an arts institution only, and only slowly did the professional faculties emerge: Engineering in 1879 as the School of Practical Science until 1889 when it became the Faculty of Engineering; Medicine and Agriculture in 1887; Dentistry in 1888; Law in 1889; Pharmacy in 1892; and Education in 1906.

Meanwhile in 1853, the University of Toronto came under the aegis of the government (rather than being under the control of a Church body), a situation that would not change until the 1906 Act, some fifty years later. Government control hurt the University from the beginning. Faculty appointments were often made on the basis of nepotism as opposed to quality. The University lost outstanding scholars such as John Tyndall and Thomas Huxley, both of whom were overlooked for appointments of less qualified individuals who happened to have political connections. Friedland notes that: "Fifty years later, in 1901, Professor A.B. Macallum, one of Toronto's most distinguished scientists and the first Canadian-born member of the Royal Society of London, stated that if Huxley and Tyndall had been appointed, 'Toronto, as a seat of learning, today would more than rival the leading universities of this Continent'" (49). Friedland also points out the number of notable scholars who were refused appointments at the University because they were Jews, a clandestine policy that severely hurt the intellectual caliber of the institution. For example, Louis Namier, later to become an outstanding British historian, was turned down for an appointment in the Department of Political Economy because he was Jewish. The first Jew to be appointed to the faculty was Jacob Finkelman in the Faculty of Law, and that was not until 1930. Women were also discriminated against both as students and as faculty members. The first female student to enter University College arrived in 1884, despite much opposition to her being there.

Academic freedom was slow to become a recognized need at the University of Toronto. One of the first cases was the dismissal of William Dale in 1895, a popular University College professor of Latin, by the government. Students rallied behind their popular professor, the protest spearheaded by William Lyon Mackenzie King, the future prime minister of Canada. King introduced a motion at a protest meeting on the campus, "to abstain from attendance at lectures at University College until a proper investigation be granted by the provincial government into the difficulties existing in the University" (158). The boycott was successful, but not the attempt to reinstate Dale. But according to Friedland, the controversy did point to the danger "of giving the government the power to appoint," and led to the establishment of the Royal Commission of 1906, that among other things, would recommend that the University "should be in the hands of an independent board of governors or trustees who would be responsible for overseeing its affairs" (172). It was also agreed that the board would be responsible for selecting the president, who would be the "chief executive officer" of the University. The role of the chancellor became a ceremonial one, and the position of vice-chancellor was eliminated entirely.

One of the first acts of the new governing body was to choose a new president. Robert Falconer became the choice, a wise decision. Falconer would lead the University from 1907 until his retirement in 1932, taking the institution through the tumultuous years of the Great War and the growth of the 1920s. Adding to the University's growing reputation during the 1920s was the discovery of insulin by Frederick Banting and Charles Best (along with James Collip and J.J. Macleod). The University celebrated the hundredth anniversary of its founding in 1927, a crowning achievement for a decade of incredible growth and success.

The 1930s were plagued by dissent and protest. Friedland entitles his chapter on the 1930s, "Depressing Times." Frank H. Underhill, a professor of history, spearheaded the protest. He was outspoken against the Ontario and Canadian governments, against the British Empire, and against capitalists. From 1939 to 1941, Underhill was threatened with dismissal from the University for his controversial views. Opposing Underhill all the way was Falconer's successor as President – Canon Henry Cody. Cody actually recommended Underhill's dismissal, but he recanted after experiencing strong opposition from both faculty and students.

Also controversial in the post-World War II years was the choosing of a new president to succeed Cody. Vincent Massey of the wealthy Massey family and a great benefactor of the University, clearly wanted the position, and Cody originally backed him. But others in the University and the Ontario government favoured Sydney Smith of Manitoba. In the end, Smith got the position. The supporters of Massey were angry and outraged. They got revenge by having Massey appointed as the Chancellor – much to the annoyance of Canon Cody who had hoped to acquire the position for himself upon relinquishing his position as President. Such controversy was evidence of the importance and prestige associated with the positions of President and Chancellor of this venerable institution.

Friedland sees the 1950s as a decade of fun, frivolity, and football for the students. For the University administrators, it was a time of fund-raising and expansion in anticipation of the influx of the baby boomers. He compares the complacency and calm on campus in the 1950s with the unrest and protest of the 1960s, and attributes the latter to the Vietnam War, sexual freedom, and the rise of gay rights. There also seemed to be unlimited amounts of government

money, and three new colleges appeared: Innis, Scarborough, and Erindale. Then two decades of cutbacks, and confusion as to the direction the University should take followed in the 1970s and 1980s. What helped to propel the University out of the negativism was the awarding of the Nobel Prize in Chemistry to John Polanyi. The award also gave the University a greater international presence.

Friedland ends his study with "A Walk Through the Campus," in which particular sites on campus trigger memories of important events in the University's history. Friedland refrains from making any grand conclusions on the University's history, content to let its past speak for itself; he also is guarded about predicting its future.

If there is one weakness in Friedland's history it is his account of the post-World War II period. In the earlier, more "historical" chapters, Friedland was willing to discuss the controversies and weaknesses as well as the University's successes. But as he gets closer to the present, his study becomes bland, more descriptive than analytical, more bombastic than critical. Given that the book is a celebration of the 175<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the University, Friedland is evidently reticent to "spoil the party" by dealing with recent contentious issues. Still, this is a fine history of the University of Toronto: well-researched, well-organized, and well-written. He is to be commended for his effort.