

## Compte rendu

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par Richard A. Jarrell

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## Book Reviews / Comptes rendus

### General / Général

*The University of Toronto: A History.* By Martin L. Friedland. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002. 764 p. ISBN 0-8020-4429-8. \$60.)

The university history, as an historical genre, is easily derided. If you have read many of them, as I have done, you will know that most are little more than catalogues of names and events. Most are commissioned to honour a milestone of the institution's history, and a self-congratulatory tone is a *sine qua non* for such volumes. This is not surprising. Such volumes are authored by those who were students or faculty members (or both) at the institution and who nurture a love for it.

The University of Toronto has not lacked in histories, both official and unofficial, and memoirs by its members. This is hardly surprising considering the university's age, its size and complexity. Toronto always dominated its provincial siblings in the nineteenth century. By the turn of the twentieth, it was not only the largest university in Canada, it was the largest in the British Empire. It remains the largest in Canada and may still be the largest in the Commonwealth in 2003. In 1997, a university committee chose Martin Friedland, an eminent professor of law who was just retiring, to undertake the task of writing the first full history since Stewart Wallace's 1927 work. The milestone was the 175<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the granting of a royal charter in 1827. I admit to having some difficulty with this milestone. The University of Toronto has worked overtime to market its image of "175 years of great minds." To quibble: the university was *not* founded in 1827. Archdeacon John Strachan obtained a charter for a non-inclusive, Anglican establishment, King's College, in that year. For a variety of reasons, the institution did not open its doors until 1843; thanks to controversy in a largely non-Anglican province, King's soon became the University of Toronto, open to all (men). But 175 years sounds better than 159!

When Stewart Wallace wrote the last full history of the university, he could draw upon his own recollections of events and speak with colleagues who had been part of the university for much of its existence. To tackle such a task in the 1990s would daunt any historian. The

university, with some 70,000 students, thousands of faculty members and staff, and a bewildering array of faculties, schools, departments, hospitals, clinics, laboratories, institutes and centres is difficult to comprehend at any one moment. To put all of its development into a single volume sounds like a recipe for disaster.

Is Friedland successful? The answer is an unqualified yes. If you wanted to name all the names and record all significant events, you would require a multi-volume, unreadable history. For a readable volume, one must be highly selective. From the perspective of a reader of *Scientia Canadensis*, has Friedland provided a solid coverage of science, engineering and medicine? Again, the answer is yes. You sense that a non-scientist is relaying the history of science to a non-scientific reader, but it is handled well. Friedland has wisely spent more time on individuals who made a difference, and their discoveries, rather than the Byzantine history of departments and programmes. For those interested in finer-grained studies, a number of specific histories exist (and Friedland's bibliography is quite exhaustive). What is important is the author's acknowledgement of the strength of science, engineering and medicine in the university.

The thematic organization is essentially chronological by presidential administration, but within each bloc, chapters feature specific issues such as research, professional development, administrative changes, government relations, student affairs and many others. Coverage is even-handed: scientists and physicians are no more favoured in the text than humanists and social scientists. Given his background, he has given the lawyers surprisingly little space. As Friedland moves into the 1950s and beyond, the number of new programmes, centres and institutes becomes so great that he has to deal with them in a line or two (or less!). Readers of this journal will wonder how the Institute for History and Philosophy of Science and Technology fares. It receives five sentences, four of which deal with Stillman Drake.

Much of Toronto's history up to the first decade of the twentieth century centred upon its rivalry with sectarian colleges and, through federation, the absorption of Victoria (Methodist), St Michael's (Roman Catholic), Knox (Presbyterian), Wycliffe and Trinity (low and high Anglican, respectively). Once that happened, the colleges receded from view, and, indeed, from Friedland's text. Anyone interested in their evolution must look elsewhere.

Most books in this genre suffer from a lack of contextualization, and this work is no different. Events described rarely occurred outside the boundaries of the campus. For a graduate of Toronto, who might be more interested in what transpired within—especially when he or she was a student, context might be of less importance. For those who

would like to fit Toronto's story into a wider picture, they had best be prepared before reading this work. The only general introductory survey to Ontario university history is Brian McKillop's *Matters of Mind: The University in Ontario, 1791–1951* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), which is recommended. For the period after 1951, you are on your own.

Despite its drawbacks (and they are few), this is a remarkable study. Well written, it is no chore to read. There is much human detail here. Not all is heroic deed, but the darker side of the university's history, such as anti-semitism and the belated acceptance of women into the full life of the university, receive a full treatment. This reviewer was quite taken aback in 1968 to find Hart House closed to women for most functions, having come from Indiana University where the student union had always welcomed female students.

One has to admire Friedland's ability to provide a satisfying picture of the evolution of one of North America's oldest and most eminent universities in fewer than 700 pages. When the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary (real or imagined) arrives, how will Friedland's successor manage?

Richard A. Jarrell

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