

University College

A Personal History

by Murray Donnelly

This history is dedicated to the memory of Irene Anderson.

Although University College was founded in 1964, the idea behind it began several years prior to this. The main reason for its creation was simply the massive increase in the number of students attending high school in Manitoba and the certainty that if the normal percentage came on to University, a very difficult space problem would be created. But it was not just a matter of physical space. Many felt that the principles of higher education would be threatened or destroyed by the factory-like system that it was feared would result from large classes. The first official recognition that such a problem existed, or was likely to, is found in the Report of the President for 1956-67. Dr. Hugh Saunderson wrote:

The University Faculty of Arts and Science (they were one then) will shortly reach a sign where personal links will be difficult to maintain. We are, therefore, faced with the necessity of choosing between two systems. One would be a structure like that of the large American University of ten to fifteen thousand students. The other would be the College system which, if sound in principle, might be duplicated several times as rising enrollment demanded.

During the next few years many statements were made and many questions asked about the problems posed by rising enrollment. On April 4, 1957, a member of faculty council asked if the administration had any intention of placing a building on the central square of the campus. The rumour was not denied nor was it confirmed. On January 25, 1958, C. Meredith Jones, who was Head of the French Department and who chaired the ad hoc committee on buildings, gave a report of how much space was likely to be needed by Arts



and Science. One month later he reported that all the space in the Arts building (now Tier) was being used to capacity. At the same meeting a motion was passed to create the Arts Building Committee which was asked to study the whole question of space but in particular: "to investigate the feasibility of an Arts College". Jones was Chairman; other members were Vice-President Jack Hoogstraten, Dean William Sibley, Ms. Audrey Huntingford (Dean of Women), Professors Edmund Berry, William Stobie and Thomas S. Webster. The author of this history was the secretary.

On October 13, 1959, Jones reported that the committee was recommending that provision of new space take the form of a College with a total of 750 students - 250 of whom would be in residence. The Chairman had travelled

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widely in Canada and the United States, making a thorough study of how residences were organized; the one that was eventually constructed owes much to his work. The committee had great difficulty in defining the role of the College. It did agree that the College could not be autonomous with its own curriculum. It would not be like St. John's or St. Paul's which had moved to the Fort Garry site in 1958 and were known as "affiliated" colleges. New College would be a "constituent", and, while it would have its own head, it would be under

the jurisdiction of the Dean of Arts and Science. It would have powers over "domestic" matters, but these were not clearly defined. The main advantage was that the College would become a society, and all its members would have a sense of belonging to a community. The impersonality which seemed inevitable in a large institution would be mitigated.

The alternative, as the Manitoban put it, was: "Say there, 957845, do you sometimes get the feeling that your professor does not know you are alive. Don't feel offended. You can't be sure that he is alive either. He may have expired since your last TV lecture was taped."



There were many in the faculty who were vigorously opposed to the idea of a College. Many felt that the organization would have no power and no definable purpose. Creation of knowledge was the job of the University. Communities would create themselves. Suppose, they argued, that part of a department moved to the College and part stayed behind. Surely this would weaken the department and create a sense of isolation among those who moved.

The report of October 13 recommending a College was debated at two special meetings of the faculty council, the last being on October 21. The motion to proceed was carried by the deciding vote of the Dean, W. J. Waines. Sometime before the vote was taken, a professor of mathematics, being bored with the rhetoric, retired to his office for a period, and during his absence the vote was taken. Had he been present, he would have voted in the negative. The recommendation was then sent to the Board of Governors where, in January, 1959, it was approved after "extensive discussion".

At the meeting of the faculty council on October 19, 1961, the Dean announced that the Arts Building Committee had been replaced by a College Advisory Committee under the chairmanship of W. L. Morton; otherwise membership in the committee remained unchanged. Morton was a logical choice. Many felt he was the most distinguished scholar on campus and the foremost historian in the country, rivalled only by Donald Creighton at the University of Toronto. Because of his prestige, he was thought to be the best person to implement a controversial decision although nothing whatever was known, at this stage, about his views on what the College ought to attempt.

Morton decided that he wanted to be called Provost. This designation was chosen from several other suggestions: principal, warden, master, president, dean, and censor. On April 25, the Dean wrote the President and gave the following explanation:



Morton favours the term 'Provost' for two reasons: (a) this college is to be under the authority of the President, and the head of it is to be the President's deputy. This relationship needs to be emphasized, and the word 'Provost' by its meaning perfumes this function; (b) the term 'warden' is misleading because it is locally used as the title for the head of an affiliated college.

By the time Morton's appointment was announced, working drawings, done by Moody and Moore, were complete and the total cost was estimated at \$3,214,663.00 which included the following facilities: a dining room facility with a large dining room (the Great Hall), a kitchen, and a private dining room; a residence wing with space for 150 male students and 100 female students; and at ground level a large common room, a suite for the College Manager (or Porter as he was called by Morton), a guest suite, the general office, and the area that became the Senior Common Room. There were also to be built an office wing with accommodation for the professors, a student lounge and rooms for student organizations. The classroom wing was to house a planetarium and language laboratory. A Provost's house would stand apart from the main complex but be connected by tunnel.

All of us who knew Bill Morton were aware of the complexity of his character, but everyone understood that one of his main characteristics was simple and easily understood. He was a man of prodigious energy based on massive physical strength and all of this was devoted to the creation of University College.

He was a shrewd judge of character and no where did this show more clearly than in his appointment of Tony Brouwer as Porter. Morton had known Tony as a caretaker in the Arts Building, and he brought him to University College. It was a move that paid off handsomely. Tony was always willing to help anyone - student or professor - and, over the years,



he made a major contribution to the sense of community that developed at University College.

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To some Bill Morton seemed a man of excessive dignity, even pompousness, and he often gave cause for such assessment. But as this writer knows, he could knock back his Scotch and tell stories with the best. His anecdotal knowledge of the more colourful characters in the fur trade was unrivalled. But perhaps his prime social

characteristic was a belief in a social order characterized by rank, authority, civility and obedience.

Soon after his appointment as Provost, he presented the Advisory Committee with a draft of “provisional regulations” to be valid for a period of five years beginning in November, 1962. One section read:

The purpose of the College is to provide a fellowship devoted to a life of study and discussion; to see to it that numbers and busyness do not separate students from students and diminish the companionship of study; to provide for the mastery of symbols, evidence and ideas; to provide at all levels of study and at all convenient times, opportunity for the discussion and refinement of ideas tested by formal discourse and conversation; to cultivate a sense of the wholeness of knowledge in all the arts and sciences; to bring together a company, men and women from diverse fields of scholarship and walks of life.

While no one on the Advisory Committee was ready to oppose this statement, some felt it sounded more like the description of a monastery than a College; others felt it was expressed in pompous language, and almost everyone agreed it was too idealistic... .

One part of the provisional regulations did cause open and vigorously expressed objection. It stated that only those: “of professional rank of at least three years standing ... shall



be Fellows of the College". This group would be the governing body, and all others would have to earn their way on. One assistant professor wrote a very strong letter of protest stating that if this was the way things were to be, he wanted no part of it. The Provost threatened to resign but was talked out of it. The offending clause was deleted. The draft also provided for Honorary Fellows, who would be distinguished citizens of the community, and Associate Fellows from among the faculty. Both groups, the rules said: "would be expected to dine in Hall whenever invited". Some members, of the committee wondered what would happen if anyone failed to dine as prescribed; the answer was that they would cease to be Fellows of the College. News of this plan for force-fed students and honorary fellows reached Max Ferguson of the CBC in Toronto, and he turned it into an amusing skit. Morton got a copy of the tape and played it back one night at dinner. He seemed to enjoy it as much as anyone.

When the tenders for the complex were opened, it was found that the lowest, that of Trident Construction, was well above the amount of money in the budget. The administration began to search for places where cut-backs could be made without doing too much damage. The Provost's house was immediately considered, and if the original proposal had been to eliminate the whole thing, it might have been accepted. Instead the finance committee of the board decided to do away with the underground passage connecting it to the College, and one member of the board suggested that they buy the Provost a new overcoat. The remark got back to Morton who angrily declared that this was just one more example of the failure of most people to understand what he was trying to accomplish. He wrote a long and vigorous memorandum which is marked "signed but not sent". It gives a good indication of his thinking. In one paragraph he makes the point that the passageway was to exit in the Senior Common Room. "Guests", he wrote, "will be entertained by the Head of his house. This must be so as the Head of the College cannot be a member of the Senior Common Room;



he can only introduce his guests there immediately before dinner and visit briefly after dinner". It was just as well that this memo was not sent since no one on the board, or in the University for that matter, had ever heard of this rule that Morton had imported from Oxford. He also mentioned the necessity of guest putting on their "wraps" in winter and questioned where they would leave them when they had scurried across the space. In his mind the whole thing proved that the Board had no appreciation of the social graces.

*"It will be no more
mock Oxford than
mock turtle is turtle."*

Morton was often accused of attempting to create "Oxford on the Red", and there was some truth to the charge. He denied it with some heat and he once said to the writer (who never knew what he meant): "It will be no more mock Oxford than mock turtle is turtle." Incidentally, the problem of the underground passageway was eventually solved by abolishing both the house and the passage.

Morton's attention to detail was remarkable; he tested everything against his principles of civilized behaviour and good education. In March, 1963, he reviewed the working drawings of rooms in the residence, and, after making eight suggestions, he concluded:

While I approve of the position agreed upon for the bookshelves, I still regret the lack of flexibility in the number of shelves allowed. The psychological reasons for this are more important. No suggestion of limitation should be made with respect to books. A collection of books whether large or small, well or badly chosen, well kept or shabby, is a most striking expression of personality. The book collection and the shelves should fit the personality of the student and will be, all unconsciously, an important part of his/her education as well as an expression of the educated personality.



While no detail escaped his attention, some caused impatience. On January 24, 1963, the College advisory committee had before it, among other things, the question of clocks: how many should there be and where should they be put? The minutes of this particular question read: "The following clocks were authorized - one in the kitchen area, one in the Great Hall and one each in the student general study rooms, as many as may be necessary in the lecture and study rooms to be visible from any point, two in the Planetarium, one of which is to be sidereal and one ordinary." The Minutes give no account of the debate that preceded these decisions. One member felt that we were all too aware of time and that all clocks should be covered with a suitable material with a zipper down the middle. Vice-President Hoogstraten was asked from what distance a person could see the time and answered that it would depend on the person's eyesight and the size of the numerals. Finally Morton had had enough; throwing his papers on the floor, he growled: "To hell with clocks, I shall depend on internal rhythms."

But sometimes it all seemed worthwhile as in the fall of 1963 when the cornerstone was laid. The fall issue of the Alumni Journal gave the following account:

September days are traditionally crisp, but Thursday, September 26, 1963, was a warm one, giving a sunny wooden forms and scaffolding, President Saunderson told of the hopes of the College ... the Premier (Duff Roblin) then laid the cornerstone ... and was presented with a scroll naming him the first Honorary Fellow.

Morton also wanted to give Roblin a copy of his new book, *The Critical Years*, a story of the period immediately preceding Confederation. The publishers had given assurance that it would be ready but it was not. Only the dust jacket was printed and this the Premier was given neatly wrapped around an empty box.



University College was opened to students in September, 1964. The formal and official opening was on October 29 when a fall Convocation was held. Douglas LePan, of the University of Toronto, and Margaret Ormsby, of the University of British Columbia, were given Honorary Degrees, Provost Morton gave a thoughtful address. The circumstances could not have been more appropriate. The Great Hall is a beautiful room with its inlaid floor, matching panelling of British Columbia fir around the walls and a lighted ceiling supported by four graceful pillars on each side. Jim Christie, of Moody and Moore, who had designed it, regarded it as the finest thing he had ever done. Then there was the Morton touch. As the Provost spoke from behind the High Table, he could see at the far end the Minstrels' Gallery he had insisted on.

The total number of students registered were 644 of which 220 were in residence and 424 were day-students. All the professors from Classics, German, History, Icelandic, Philosophy and Political Studies came. Only some elected to come from English, French and Mathematics.

The tutorial system, so often spoken of, was regarded as an important part of the scholarly community. It was to be the link between the faculty and the students. In fact, there were two systems - one for the residence and one for the day students - with Professor Jack Stevenson in charge of both. On the day-side the great weakness was that the faculty member to whom the student was assigned could not give advice about the courses being taken as that would have been regarded as an infringement on departmental authority. The role of the professor was that of a "friend in need" and a link to the academic community. The system was, for the most part, a failure. Many students never reported to the person they were assigned to and many who did never went back.

In the residence the term Don, rather than tutor, was used. There was one for every two floors, and a system developed which allowed them to be chosen by the students on a selection committee. The Provost had a veto but it was rarely



used. The offices were almost always filled by graduate or senior students. Within a few years the residence developed an identity and pride. The Dons played an important part in this development.

There were two student societies: One was set up by the day students and one by the residence students. Unfortunately the day students adopted a constitution based on a direct democracy. All actions taken by the society had to be initiated at a general assembly at which a majority of the members were present and only then could the executive take action. The result was the opposite of what was intended. The general assembly almost never met, and the executive came to exercise all power.

The residence society, on the other hand, worked very well partly because the voters were living together and were in daily contact. The convention shortly developed that if the chairman was from the men's side, the vice-chairman would be female, and vice versa.

Morton attached great importance to the High Table. On September 28, 1964, it was announced that "...there will be a high Table five nights a week". Twice a term the dinner was called a feast, and an attempt was made to bring town and gown together by inviting guests from the City. Early in September a notice was posted reading as follows:

All members of the College dining in Hall will please be in their places by 6 p.m. A warning buzzer will sound at 5:45 p.m. Women will wear dresses or suits (not slacks); men will wear coats and ties; both will wear gowns. All will please remain standing until the High Table enters and the Provost or member of the College presiding invites the members assembled to be seated.

The Provost saw these dinners as one of the important civilizing influences on students and a chance for them to learn from their elders. But there were, quite apart from principle, crippling practical problems right from the

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beginning. First, there was the question of waiters; if kitchen help was used, they would demand overtime, and this was not in the budget. This was temporarily solved by employing students and paying them an amount that was below the minimum wage. A system called family service was adopted which meant the students were not served personally but that each table was given trays and bowls to be passed up and down. Only the High Table received personal service.

These problems were minor compared to the one presented by the day students. They were required to "dine in hall" twice a term, but when they registered in the fall of 1964 no one thought to make them buy tickets in advance. As a result few stayed for dinner, particularly if their car pools were leaving at 4:30. In a letter dated December 29, 1964, the Provost reminded them of their obligation. He noted that they had not been "dining in hall" and added:

You will do so, we are sure, when you realize the purpose of the requirement, which you accepted as one of the terms of membership when you registered, which is to afford you one more way of entering into the life of the College. Should you refuse to do so, and failure now would be a refusal, we greatly regret that we must ask you to withdraw from membership in the College not later than January 31 next.

How many letters were sent is not known, but the writer was told that the figure was 150. Neither is it known how many actually bought tickets after receiving the letter.

Clearly there were many who regarded the dining requirement as unnecessary and unfair. Some students demanded an answer to the question of who was paying for these guests. When none was forthcoming from the Provost, they appealed to the Comptroller who took the question seriously and noted in a letter to the Provost that at the last "feast" there had been 32 guests. This question was never



resolved. Another appeared which was more serious and eventually destroyed the High Table concept. A majority of the students, residence and day, wanted dinner at 5:30 or, better still, a cafeteria system operating between five and six. They reached the Comptroller who agreed to discuss it with Morton. The Provost was offended that the question had been raised at all and wrote: "I can only regard the suggestion as a threat to what we are trying to do through our dinners, and I am very disturbed by the factors involved, difficult as I know them to be. It does seem to me that when thought is given to the amenities of life and a social education for our students, it is wrong to consider any arrangement that would destroy this work." But eventually the hunger of the students won out as the Comptroller and kitchen staff wanted it to. The truth is that they had all been making fun of the High Table dinners ever since they started.

The first year had thus been very discouraging. When the second began, Morton made it clear that he was not planning to stay around much longer. He was now devoting almost all his prodigious energies to the Canadian Centennial History series which he edited. He seemed to accept the fact that civilized social behaviour (as he defined it) among students was impossible.

In November, 1965, Morton announced that he had accepted a position at Trent as Master of Champlain College. The administration created a search committee for the new Provost and its chairman, President Saunderson, wrote other Presidents across the country asking for suggestions. Only two agreed to come for an interview: James Gray, of the Department of English at Bishops College; and T. M. Penelhum, a professor of Philosophy at the University of Alberta at Calgary. Penelhum was offered the position but refused. Gray, for reasons unknown to the writer, was regarded as unsuitable. On February 26, 1966, all members of the College council were notified that the writer had been offered and accepted the position.



It soon became obvious that anti-Vietnam sentiments and anti-administration feeling, not gown and High Table dinners, was what a majority of students were interested in. A multiplicity of groups sprang up: Marxists, Maoists and Trotskyites (the "Trots") ---called the "radiator radicals" because of their habit of sitting on the radiators that lined the corridor next to the Junior Common Room -- while the memberships seemed to know little of what they were supporting, they did so with great enthusiasm. There was also a very considerable group of intelligent and thoughtful people who were critical not just of Vietnam but of the basic institutions of society. This was the group that many of us felt that we should appeal to and support, for it seemed to us that to take a critical look at society was very much a part of university life. One of the first decisions we, of the new administration, took was to bring in speakers who would understand and address the concerns of these students.

By letter of July 26, 1966, Patrick Watson was invited and agreed to come in the fall. His fee was \$150.00. Watson, had, in 1966, been removed from his position as co-host of the CBC program "This Hour has Seven Days" because he was thought to be too radical and unconventional. He was a smash hit at University College. We put him in the largest theatre available and also carried his speech on closed circuit television in other parts of the college. At all points there was standing room only.

We were all greatly encouraged by this initial success and set up the College Activities Committee to plan for future speakers. It brought in a great many over the next few years. Almost all were well received. Alan King, maker of the then controversial film, Warrendale, followed Watson. A particular circumstance made his film very popular. Our application to the Censorship Board of Manitoba to show the film was rejected. I phoned the Chairman to ask why, and he asked if I realized that the word f--k was in that film. We decided to show the film anyway and let them charge us. We were



saved from this when the Attorney General, Stewart MacLean, overruled the board. All of this became known to the students, and once again we had an overflow crowd.

Space does not permit discussing all the speakers and special programs we put on over the next few years but two come to mind immediately: David Cornwell, who wrote under the pen name of John LeCarre, and Mordecai Richler. Cornwell drew a standing-room-only crowd even though his speech was about literary criticism and not spies. He was also a very talented mimic and, in private, did impersonations of the leading public figures of the day. He also did one of President Saunderson. Richler posed as someone who hated all student protesters, accusing them of shouting insults from a safe distance while reinforcing his rhetoric with swigs of straight Scotch from a bottle he kept under the lectern.

In 1967, after abolishing most of the activities associated with the High Table and making gowns optional, we began discussing the question of student representation on our governing body, the College Council, and its committees. It is hard at the time of this writing to imagine the strength of the views held by those who opposed students' representation on any governing body. Fortunately, the most vocal were not members of University College. We went ahead after much debate and asked the two student societies to arrange for the election of six students. Our experience was that they made a worthwhile contribution.

There were many at University College who felt that we must offer some courses for credit that were not given elsewhere and which would become our intellectual trade mark. We gave careful study to this question including the possibility of an interdisciplinary course. A questionnaire was sent to our members to which we received many thoughtful replies. We finally decided to offer for credit (after getting permission from the University Senate) a course called "The Individual in North American Society". The calendar description read: "An appraisal from various perspectives



of alienation, prejudice, affluence, bureaucracy, and other contemporary phenomena affecting the quality of individual life in Canada and the United States. It is intended that analysis and discussion will involve several departments, guest speakers and maximum student participation." The course was given at the 300 level by professors from English, History and Political Studies. These professors undertook this work in addition to their regular load and without extra payment. They were all men of strong beliefs who continually quarrelled with one another during the class. For the really bright students this was enjoyable, but the majority were confused and lost. The course was dropped after one year. We soon reached the conclusion that our academic contribution would have to be through the existing courses rather than through new ones for credit.

About 1970 a number of people in the College became interested in ecology and began to ask themselves if serious damage was being done to the environment by various industrial processes. Several lunch-time seminars were held in the Private Dining Room. Out of these two programs arose. Some professors of Civil Engineering attended the discussions, and eventually this department in cooperation with Political Studies introduced a course for credit called "Technology and Society". It is still being given with Philosophy rather than Political Studies accounting for the input from Arts. Unfortunately, very few arts students have ever registered; the students have been largely from Civil Engineering which has allowed the course as a non-technical elective.

Concern about the environment had another academic result. Three departments, Political Studies, Philosophy and Economics, agreed to put an "ecological component" in one section of a first-year course. This meant that ecological questions would be discussed from the point of view of each discipline. Three times a term the students from all three courses would meet to hear a special speaker and then break up into discussion groups, with more or less equal



representation from each department. These discussions were held on Saturday and to our surprise a large number of students attended. The program lasted three years and only ceased when one of the departments lost interest.

The College has always attempted to fill special needs or build programs around particular events. In 1974 we organized a program in commemoration of the City of Winnipeg Centennial. The unique ethnic composition of the city was discussed and illustrated by music, song and dance. An afternoon was spent on the Winnipeg General Strike, which many students heard about for the first time. Another period was devoted to the depression. James Gray addressed a large audience on this subject.

Activities such as this have been the responsibility of the College Activities Committee. Chaired by the Vice-Provost and including academic staff and students in its membership, it has always been important. In recent years it has gone beyond the lunch-time discussions and organized art exhibitions, musical events, and poetry readings, and shown films of special interest. However, the tradition of lunch-time discussions in the Private Dining Room has been maintained.

University College is not just buildings and activities but a community. Nowhere is this better exemplified than in the Senior Common Room, one part of the College which has not received the recognition it deserves. Throughout this brief history names of particular people have not been mentioned unless the citation was unavoidable. The reason for this is that there are far too many who could be cited. The major contribution of the support staff is a perfect example. But to talk of the Senior Common Room, the coffee-room and social centre for the college faculty, one must at least mention its first Chairman, Bill Smith (1964-1966), who gave a marvellous start, and the current Chairman, David Howorth, whose Friday lunches and various evening parties have added so much. Despite the belief of Bill Morton that he could not be a member, the Common Room is in a unique way a link



with his term. One of the first things Bill did was to put down a wine cellar paid for partly by the Administration and partly by guests who came to dinner. The Friday lunches put on by David Howorth would be incomplete without a selection of fine wine. When next we meet a suitable toast might be: "Here's to the next 25 years. May they be as interesting and challenging as the first 25."