

Martin L. Friedland. *The University of Toronto: A History.* University of Toronto Press, 2002. Pp. xiii, 764.

One did not really believe it could be done. Not in one volume, not by one author, not with any grace or charm. From the diverse, sprawling character of both subject and sources, a history of the University of Toronto was almost bound to be a lumpish catalogue, ponderous but superficial.

It is none of those things. True, the book weighs in at just under four pounds, and is hard to hold for very long. It won't do in bed. But all that represents is a minor defect of very great virtues. Occasionally the University of Toronto Press can make a dreary production, but this one is a gem, print, paper, finish, and not least a glorious run of pictures. One can enjoy the book just for the pictures.

But it is the author who is remarkable. Martin Friedland's personal academic history suggests his range: B.Com., LL.B., Ph.D. One thinks of the motto of Larousse, the famous French publishing house, "Je sème à tout vent." Professor Friedland writes as if he wanted his book to be read. And read, indeed, it can be. Inevitably its architectonic structure obtrudes a little from time to time, but the author's capacity to think and write carries the reader through any bumps in the road. One is never left to wander alone among strange gods surrounded by incomprehensible narrative. Sometimes the author reminds one of Virgil taking Dante, you the reader, through the vertiginous dangers of the Inferno. Even in the most difficult sections, the big changes in the constitution of the University of Toronto in 1887 and 1971, Professor Friedland has the good lawyer's knack for making it intelligible.

The University of Toronto was founded in 1827. In 2003 it is probably the largest university north of Mexico: over 50,000 students, 3,000 faculty, three campuses, several colleges, many specialized research centres. The central campus is a big place in the very heart of Toronto, a welcoming green space of light and air and civilization. The university's motto embodies green. *Velut arbor aevo*: just the way a tree matures. It is now of such a substantial maturity and range that several recent attempts to prepare its history have not succeeded.

The University of Toronto began as most Canadian universities did, religion-centred. Founded in 1827 as King's College, it began as an Anglican establishment. Therein lay its problem. As of 1841 Anglicans were only 22 per cent of

Canada West's (Ontario after 1867) population, while Presbyterians were close behind with 20 per cent and Methodists with 17 per cent, and the latter two were increasing their proportions all the time. These and other denominations were not at all happy with Anglican dominance, and in 1850 the University of Toronto was created to disconnect it.

The early professors were apt to be tough, narrow, English ecclesiastics. Rev. Dr. James Beaven (1801-1875) taught divinity at King's College; then, on the 1850 conversion to the University of Toronto, he had instead to teach ethics and metaphysics. He hated the conversion; but with a family of seven children and no pension in sight, he could not afford to resign. Lively he was not. One day his students had had enough. They put a stuffed monkey on Beaven's professorial chair at the head of the class. Beaven came in. He looked at the monkey, then at the class, bowed low to the students and remarked, "Ah, gentlemen, I see that at last you have a professor suited to your capacity." So saying, he walked out. Somewhere in that sinewy mind there was a sense of humour. Finally in 1871 Beaven was forced to resign.

By this time there was a Methodist college, Victoria, at Cobourg; a Presbyterian one, Queen's, at Kingston; the Anglicans now had Trinity College on Queen Street, Toronto; and there was the non-denominational one, the University of Toronto, that godless one that the others warred against. Ecclesiastical disputes sharpen intellectual swords! The University of Toronto was re-established in 1887 under a federal principle, with Methodists (Victoria was moved from Coburg), Roman Catholics (St. Michael's), and University College (non-denominational). The Anglicans (Trinity) would join the University of Toronto in 1904. Presbyterian Queen's stayed where it was in Kingston.

There was a student strike in 1895 against the dismissal of a popular professor of Latin, William Dale. Young Mackenzie King made an early reputation as student leader in this affair. It seemed to have arisen spontaneously, but Professor Friedland points out – as he so often does – that the underlying causes arose some years before. The patronage appointment of a professor of history, George Wrong, the son-in-law of the University Chancellor Edward Blake, had something to do with it. Wrong's appointment was a good one; the method of making it was not. That's something else that the author sensibly distinguishes.

In 1927, W.S. Wallace, University Librarian, published a history of the University of Toronto, 1827-1927. But of course the university kept getting bigger, especially after 1945. In 1939 the university's enrolment was about 7,000 students. By 1946-7 it was 17,000, half of whom were war veterans. They were brought to university by the Canadian government's offer of free university tuition and a living allowance to World War II veterans – as long as they kept at least second-class marks. The allowance was \$60 a month for single men, \$80 for married. Singles could usually manage to just get by on \$60. The veterans made a huge difference to the life and vivacity of the campus.

In the 1960s, with numbers still expanding, two satellite colleges, Scarborough and Erindale, were added. York University was hived off to be independent of the University of Toronto. And of course the central university just kept getting bigger and more complex. So too did internecine rivalries. An academic in full pursuit of a principle, defending a wounded ego, revelling in the delights of *Schadenfreude* or forensic enjoyment of factional infelicities, is a wonder to behold. Patience is certainly not the only attribute a university official needs, but it's an important start. One doctor (doctors are not always the most tractable people in the world) at St. Michael's, Dr. Joseph Sullivan, wrote to Henry Borden, Chairman of the Board, "I do not intend to sit idly by and see the great hospital of St. Michael's...be sacrificed on the funeral pyre for the benefit of Sunnybrook Hospital on account of the whims of Dean Chute and Dr Hamilton." Professor Friedland goes on to mention that Dr. Sullivan had been goalie on a famous hockey team of University of Toronto graduates at the 1928 Olympics when the opposing team failed to score a single goal. Dr Sullivan wasn't going to lose this contest, either. One of the singular virtues of this book is that it is full of these delicious little follow-throughs.

Perhaps the anguish of the university during the strident student pressures of 1968-70 might have been made more sharp, and as it was at the time, more ugly. Academics who were survivors of Nazi or Communist intimidation seemed best able to recognize what ought to be resisted and when. Not all student demands were sensible. If some were useful, others were pernicious. Students were well able to mount bullying tactics of many kinds to get what they wanted, or perhaps better to say, to get what they believed they ought to want. The author varnishes these troubles a little by showing what radicals then have

become since, viz. mostly useful members of society. That is a happy and restorative balance, but it doesn't quite measure the devastation to the ordinary decencies of university life created by the disrupters, the sit-inners, the Maoists, not a few of them American with Vietnam in their heads.

The bigger the University of Toronto grew the harder it was becoming to organize and write a coherent history of it. Robin Harris wrote a *History of Higher Education in Canada 1663-1960*, published by the University of Toronto Press in 1976; he then essayed the possibilities of a University of Toronto history but had to give it up. By the 1980s many historians were beginning to believe that it could not be done, not at least in the form of

a book that could be actually read and enjoyed.

As one looks at this marvellous work, one can only say how wrong we were. Not the least of its virtues is its splendid index, a brute to make but a very model of its kind. No long and impossible lists of numbers here! One can find whatever one needs to. Even the pictures are indexed, as they should be.

It is not often in a book review that one can truly say, compliments all round, to publisher, designers, researchers, but especially to the author. One thinks of Tolstoy's remark out of the Russian countryside, "the footsteps of the master cultivate the soil."

P.B. Waite
Professor Emeritus
Dalhousie University