

## *Book Review / Recension d'ouvrage*

Bedford, A. G. (2009). *The University of Winnipeg, vol. I: A history of the founding colleges*. Winnipeg: University of Winnipeg Press. 479 pages, ISBN 978-0-9687833-6-8 (Hardcover).

Bedford, A. G. (2009). *The University of Winnipeg, vol. II: The first forty years (1967-2007)*. Winnipeg: University of Winnipeg Press. 270 pages, 978-0-9687833-5-1 (Hardcover).

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Canadian universities always seem to be celebrating historical milestones and many such anniversary dates give birth to commemorative histories. With the approach of such dates, official histories are commissioned to capitalize on the prevailing retrospective mood. A spate of new histories have appeared recently, including those of the University of Toronto, York, Carleton, Simon Fraser, and Regina, and others are in the works. Michiel Horn's *York University: The Way Must Be Tried* (2008) is now recognized as the best of the recent crop. According to the University of Regina's historian, James M. Pitsula, Horn's history set a new standard. Reviewing the volume in *The Canadian Historical Review* (March 2010), Pitsula captured the book's strengths in these words: "Scholarly, engaging, beautifully illustrated, remarkably comprehensive, steeped in affection, but not sentimental, it is a master work of the genre."

Compared with the newer university histories, A. Gerald Bedford's two-volume history of the University of Winnipeg is a throwback. The author—a 1946 graduate of Union College and a long-time faculty member—was the institution's official chronicler until passing away in 2008. The first of the two volumes, which meticulously reconstructs the story of the University's founding colleges and was written for the University of Toronto Press in the mid-1970s, has now been republished posthumously by the University in 2009. In addition, Bedford produced a second volume, updating the history and covering the first 40 years of its existence as the reconstituted University of Winnipeg.

Bedford's first volume, subtitled *A History of the Founding Colleges*, is the weightier academic tome. Long out-of-print, it recounts, often in minute detail, the stories of the colleges that, in 1967, became the University of Winnipeg: Manitoba College (founded 1871) and Wesley College (founded 1888), which merged into United College in 1938. The author faithfully tells the story leading to the re-founding when Union College ceased being the downtown campus of the University of Manitoba and struck out on its own with a new name. It is a distinctly Whiggish volume, recounting the colleges' Protestant (Presbyterian and Methodist) denominational origins in most sympathetic terms. With the precision befitting a former mathematician, Bedford strives to get the facts straight and to find the odd hero toiling as a President, dedicated professor, or unsung administrative official who strove to keep the institution afloat in times of "poverty and political turmoil." Looming large in that whole account

is the horribly divisive internal conflict over the 1959 dismissal of United College alumnus and popular History professor, Harry Crowe.

Bedford's first volume has been republished unedited as a kind of bookend for the second installment. Given that decision, we are presented, once again, with a freshly covered, but regrettably dated version of the modern university's origins. The critical role of Wesley College in the shaping of the social gospel in Canada is given relatively short shrift. Since Richard Allen's *The Social Passion* (1971) and Ramsay Cook's intriguing 1990 *Manitoba History* article linking Wesley College to the Protestant Christian social reform movement, much more could be said about the College's formative influence on Salem Bland, J.S. Woodsworth, William Ivens, and others. Two highly publicized dismissals will continue to intrigue readers of Bedford's first volume. The first, Salem Bland's 1917 dismissal from Wesley, is notable because Bedford casts some doubt on Bland's otherwise saintly reputation (pp. 130-134). Harry Crowe's controversial 1959 expulsion by President W. C. Lockhart consumes many pages (pp. 301-330), but the author treats the episode rather clinically as "the Crowe case" and is at great pains to demonstrate how the beleaguered Lockhart withstood the pressures and survived the onslaught. Re-reading that whole section of the book, one begins to grasp why it remains unchanged from the original 1976 version. Revisiting some matters are so painful to institutions that they are better left alone.

Bedford's second volume, *The First Forty Years*, is much shorter and a much easier read. His familiar dense writing style is more leavened with metaphor, character, and circumstance. We are introduced to the newly formed University of Winnipeg with a short vignette focusing on Bedford's chance discovery of a campus excavation exposing the cornerstone foundations of historic Wesley Hall. That sets the tone for the entire second volume. It is, in simplest terms, an elaborate attempt to demonstrate that the new University remained, for its first 40 years, soundly based upon its bedrock foundations. In doing so, it traces the institutional story from President Lockhart's troubled regime through five more presidents, from a small downtown campus to an expanding presence in the city's urban core. President Henry C. Duckworth (1971-1981) is singled out as a key builder, credited with the development of the modernist edifice of Centennial Hall. According to Bedford, if the University has a latter day hero, it is the Hon. Lloyd Axworthy, who was a Winnipeg North Ender, a quintessential United Church boy, founder of the University's Urban Studies Institute, and its President since 2004. His vision for the university is proudly trumpeted, as are his plans to expand the university "beyond the block in three directions" and "beyond the campus into local and global affairs."

Bedford's two-volume history is more than just a trip down memory lane. Like many older institutional histories, it reads like a labour of love and a book more of interest to University of Winnipeggers than to the outside world. The book is organized in traditional fashion and, for the most part, built around the regimes of its clerical presidents and its post-1971 lay presidents. That structure works better when the presidents are long-serving, but less so when it comes to those like Dr. Constance Rooke, who served shorter terms in office. Focusing almost exclusively on the Office of the President makes practical sense, but it means that most events and crises are also depicted from that vantage point. The Harry Crowe affair was so divisive that it continued to cast a shadow for years later and Bedford's attempts to paper it over are patently obvious. Claiming the Crowe case as a University of Winnipeg breakthrough for "academic freedom" and describing a brief civil encounter between Crowe and Lockhart at a York University Convocation years later as a *rapprochement* stretch credibility. Prominent alumnus Joe Martin '59 and former Manitoba premier Howard Pawley would beg to differ, both describing Crowe's expulsion as one of the most horrendous acts of their lifetime.

Bedford's history shows conclusively that universities have mysterious healing powers. Page after page demonstrates that the university's late official historian possessed what he termed "a genuine affection for her" (p. ix). If leading this university is about healing, then President Axworthy may be well-suited to that task. Even normally skeptical journalists like *The Globe and Mail*'s Jeffrey Simpson seem to echo Bedford in praising Axworthy's recent success in "remaking" the institution by "turning it into the most innovative, interesting institutions for its size" and, in the process, "improving part of inner-city Winnipeg." Had Bedford still been alive, such a glowing statement might well have found its way into some future commemorative edition.

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