

Laurentian University: A History by Linda Ambrose, Matt Bray, Sara Burke, Donald Dennie, and Guy Gaudreau. Edited by Matt Bray

Thomas H.B. Symons

Volume 104, Number 1, Spring 2012

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1065405ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1065405ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

The Ontario Historical Society

ISSN

0030-2953 (print)

2371-4654 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Symons, T. H. (2012). Review of [*Laurentian University: A History* by Linda Ambrose, Matt Bray, Sara Burke, Donald Dennie, and Guy Gaudreau. Edited by Matt Bray]. *Ontario History*, 104(1), 224–227. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1065405ar>

consequence of managerial decisions, not falling labour commitment. Then, in the go-go financial atmosphere of the 1960s, the company became a mere financial asset rather than a treasured productive entity.

A shifting panorama of owners more interested in erecting financial empires in holding-company conglomerates than in producing competitive, high-quality skates and bicycles was to blame. The cycle of innovation, investment, and higher productivity desperately needed under ferocious competitive pressures was short-circuited until irretrievable damage was done the company's reputation, market share, and finances. And so, to foreshorten the tale, bankruptcy came

by 1983, along with the sale of assets and the CCM name. It was a sorry end.

This book commendably and effectively pieces together a complex story from a wide variety of sources. That difficult task is disguised through a clear expository style. While more credence might have been given to broad market forces, those forces are to be discerned in the book, and the reader will understand that managers with a steadier and more innovative hand, and capitalists dedicated more to products rather than to greed might have allowed CCM a longer ride.

Ben Forster,
University of Western Ontario

Laurentian University: A History

by Linda Ambrose, Matt Bray, Sara Burke, Donald Dennie, and Guy Gaudreau

Edited by Matt Bray

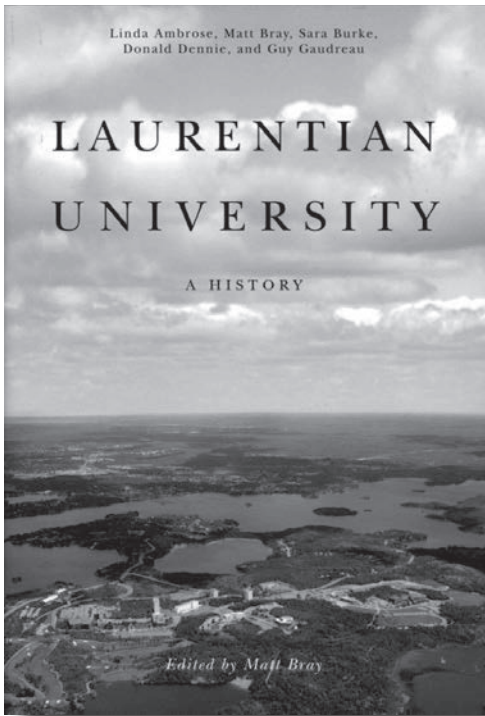
Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2010.
XIV + 409 pages. \$49.95 hardcover. ISBN 978-0-7735-3772-9. www.mqup.ca

This book purports to be a history of the first half-century of Laurentian University. But it is that and a great deal more. Because of the particular and often very complex issues involved in the founding and development of Laurentian University, arising from its geographic location and northern hinterland, and from its linguistic, cultural, economic, and religious circumstances, its founders and builders faced many special challenges as they proceeded with the task of creating a new post-secondary institution. Thus, this biography of an institution becomes, in a very real sense, an extended essay on many of the challenges faced by this country as its history unfolds.

In addition to the economic and physical challenges of its northerly location on the Laurentian Shield, the University

needed to address the particular challenges posed by its bilingual constituency. In fact, it had a tri-cultural mandate, to serve those of Indigenous culture in addition to the French and English speaking communities. Beyond that lay the reality of the extraordinarily diverse multicultural society of Sudbury and its hinterland upon which the new University had to draw for many of its students and for much of its political and financial support.

As they coped with these many special circumstances, the founders of Laurentian were dealing constantly with some of the most fundamental challenges that confront Canadian society. This is clearly reflected in this book that, in addition to portraying the birthing of a post-secondary institution, provides invaluable examples, insights, and information about the cultural,



religious, and economic issues which surround it and through which it must make its way. The new University clearly faced a multitude of enormous challenges.

The book thus has an inescapable subtext about the interaction between these factors in the University's setting and the University itself, which add immensely to its interest. But it also added immensely to the difficulties of the task undertaken by the volume's editor and authors. They have done a very good job! The five authors are all members of the faculty of Laurentian and all Canadianists who conceived the idea of writing a history of their University as an appropriate way to mark and to celebrate its fiftieth anniversary. The authors bring varied perspectives and diverse foci of interest to the project. Yet, the book has a unity of purpose and over-arching themes, which result in a coherent flow of narrative.

Its success owes much to skilful but un-

obtrusive editing by Matt Bray, himself one of the authors. It has also benefited from the indefatigable research work of Charles Levi. The project was further informed and supported by a series of research projects in which some twenty students were involved, with assistance from archivists and librarians from both the University and the City of Sudbury, as well as from a host of colleagues who shared knowledge, memories, and critical assessments.

A co-operative writing project on this scale, dealing with such complex situations and institutions, poses many and severe challenges. Much of the success of the book is due to the carefully considered structure established by the editor and authors. It opens with two introductory chapters about the historical and northern roots of the University and reviews the immediate circumstances of its founding. It then proceeds to examine the evolving history of the University around six principal themes: university governance; academic development; issues of language and culture; students; faculty matters; and the role of women. This is followed by an additional chapter outlining the associated but distinctive histories of Laurentian's three federated denominational institutions: the University of Sudbury; Huntington University; and Thornloe University. Noting that each of these institutions plans to document its own history, this treatment is rather brief and it inevitably underplays the importance of the vital place of the federated universities in Laurentian's history. Nonetheless, it is a valuable record of confederal arrangements within a larger non-denominational university. Similarly, the treatment of Laurentian's three original affiliated institutions, Collège Universitaire de Hearst, Nipissing University, and Algoma University College in Sault Ste. Marie is inevitably relatively cursory, yet useful.

It should be noted that Laurentian had a substantial and significant pre-history which, like the subsequent history of the University itself, casts light upon the many problematic considerations of culture, language, religion, economics, and politics that must be weighed up and coped with by the founders of a new post-secondary institution. Sacred Heart College, which later became the University of Sudbury, began “pedagogical practices” in 1913, establishing the beginnings of a university tradition in the north nearly fifty years before the founding of Laurentian.

Prior to this, the Society of Jesus had engaged in educational and missionary work throughout the region. The Society had responded strongly, for example, to the request of the Bishop of Peterborough to provide religious and other instruction to the thousands of railroad labourers in the large area surrounding Sudbury. Thus, when Bishop Scollard, the near-legendary Bishop of Peterborough, blessed the cornerstone of Sacred Heart College in 1913 he was adding to an already well-rooted tradition of education in northern Ontario in the Sudbury district, dating from the Jesuit mission work with Indigenous people, labourers, and French and Catholic communities, as well as their work in the preparation and training of some for the priesthood. During the ensuing half-century, the region would witness the jockeying, and also the acts of delicate balance, that would mark the progression from a situation in which one Church provided most, indeed virtually all, of what passed for higher education to a situation in which a non-denominational university would replace it in this central role, with that Church, and later others, finding, by affiliation, a significant on-going role at the post-secondary level within the one University.

Bishop Scollard was also firm in his

desire that Sacred Heart College should be a bilingual institution, all the more so in the face of the promulgation at the time of the heinous Regulation XVII forbidding French as a language of instruction in Ontario’s public schools. At the same time, Jesuits and Oblates, with so much in common, had some fierce differences. Similarly, there was a territoriality aspect in community rivalries—for example, between Sudbury and North Bay—for the location of the College. Indigenous people and other strands in the multicultural tapestry increasingly made their expectations known. Thus, from its outset, Laurentian University faced the inescapable need to work its way with and through often seemingly intractable issues and rivalries springing from differences in the society and country in which it sought to take its place.

The authors of this book are forthright in acknowledging that, despite many notable achievements, not all is satisfactory at their University. The degree of bilingualism and, more broadly, of practicing biculturalism is considerably less than had been foreseen and hoped. Similarly, the tri-cultural agenda, though substantive, has been slow to emerge. It is widely felt that women have not yet found their place in the University, in student life, in faculty and administrative positions, or on the Board.

While the book provides a good deal of interesting and instructive information about students and student life, it provides very little information about Laurentian’s alumni. Such information would be welcome and appropriate in a volume celebrating the first fifty years of a university. In addition, one must wonder at the fact that during this first half-century at Laurentian University no president or academic vice-president has served two full terms in office. Why not? The implications and consequences of this for stability, continuity,

and much else deserve far more attention than they receive in this book.

Overall though, this is a remarkable book. It deserves plaudits for its good work in recording and discussing the founding and development of a new university over the past fifty years. Thanks to the ability and integrity of its authors and editor, it is a useful, scholarly, highly professional and authoritative publication which will be of considerable interest and assistance for years to come for students of higher education and, more broadly, to many people

engaged in the wider field of Canadian studies. It is, in fact, an important contribution both to the literature on Canadian post-secondary education and to those engaged in the study of many different facets of Canadian life beyond academe. It is a work of very substantial scholarship based on extensive research and much thoughtful consultation.

Thomas H.B. Symons,
Trent University,
Chair, the Ontario Heritage Trust

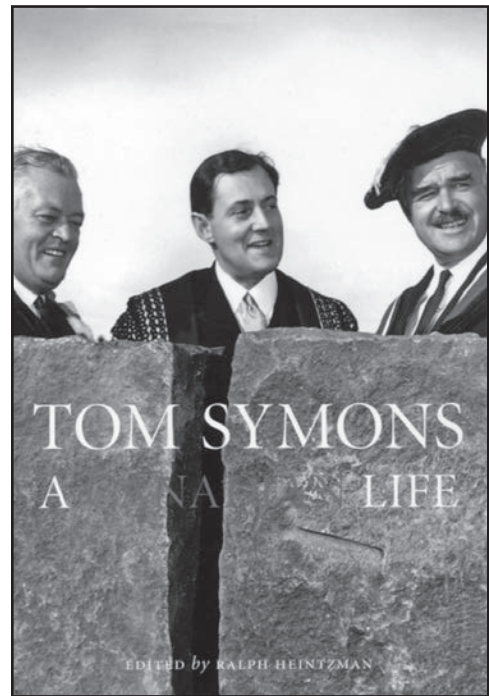
Tom Symons A Canadian Life

Edited by Ralph Heintzman

Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2011.

488 pages. \$36.95 hardcover. ISBN 978-0-7766-3043-0
(www.press.uottawa.ca)

Tom Symons A Canadian Life is an attempt to capture the essence of the many activities, the influence, and the personality of the man. As the song title goes, "Oh what a life." A modest sampling of Tom Symons' accomplishments includes: founding president of a university (Trent) at age 34, principal policy organizer for Robert Stanfield during the latter's run for the position of prime minister, lead author of a pioneering report on Canadian studies, chair of major organizations such as the Ontario Human Rights Commission and the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada, one of the forces behind the creation of Pearson College, which offers a two year, pre-university international baccalaureate, and subsequently chair of the multi-national body which was responsible for the international system of such schools, a position which began a working relationship and friendship with Prince Charles, public champion of a bicultural and multicultural Canada and of aborigi-



nal rights, and major participant in myriad other endeavours which gave him national and international influence.

This is not a biography, but rather a variation on that strange academic concept, the festschrift. Usually conceived to pay homage to a senior academic by former students, the festschrift would normally