

Growing to Serve... A History of Victoria Hospital, London, Ontario. John R. Sullivan, Norman R. Ball, London, Victoria Hospital Corporation, 1985. Pp 163, illus., index, appendices

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Volume 11, numéro 1 (32), printemps-été 1987

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/800248ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/800248ar>

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Éditeur(s)

CSTHA/AHSTC

ISSN

0829-2507 (imprimé)

1918-7750 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer ce compte rendu

Naylor, C. D. (1987). Compte rendu de [*Growing to Serve... A History of Victoria Hospital*, London, Ontario. John R. Sullivan, Norman R. Ball, London, Victoria Hospital Corporation, 1985. Pp 163, illus., index, appendices]. *Scientia Canadensis*, 11(1), 47–48. <https://doi.org/10.7202/800248ar>

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The last seven years have brought a substantial and positive change in the volume and quality of material written about our medical past. However, as Profedssor S.E.D. Shortt has recently noted in the *Journal of Canadian Studies* ['The Canadian Hospital in the Nineteenth Century: an Historiographic Lament,' *J Can Studies* 18 (winter 1983-4), 3-14] hospital historiography remains an area with considerable potential for development. A major historical overview of the hospital system is sorely needed, but in the interim, 'house histories' focussing on a single institution continue to appear.

The latest such work is *Growing to Serve*, a history of what is currently Canada's largest general hospital, Victoria -- a major referral centre that sprawls over two separate sites and includes several satellite institutions in London, Ontario. In 1975, after much initial work by the hospital archives committee, John R. Sullivan was retained as a summer student to sift and organize the collected material. Sullivan, who had studied history at the University of Toronto, then wrote a preliminary manuscript.

Sullivan departed for Colombia and a CUSO post, but various executives and doctors, particularly Dr Marvin Smout, were sufficiently convinced of the merits of the project that they turned to Dr Norman R. Ball, then Science and Engineering Archivist at the Public Archives of Canada. Dr Ball used the manuscript, assorted research files and additional research to write *Growing to Serve*. This unusual authorship arrangement has produced a volume that is a welcome addition to the collection of individual hospital histories already extant, and it is better than most in documentation, analysis and prose style.

As the title implies, the analysis reflects a positivist perspective. This is nowhere more evident than in the 'Conclusions' at the end of each chapter: these paragraphs are occasionally trite and almost invariably Whiggish.

The strengths of the work are nonetheless considerable. From its almshouse origins to its current curative-palliative focus, the hospital's evolution receives concise description. Early civic health

care institutions are discussed, and an entertaining account of administrative conflicts in the 1880s enlivens this section. A review of the origins and initial operations of Victoria Hospital sets the stage for a fine chapter on the influence of the redoubtable Adam Beck. As mayor of London and ex-officio trustee, Beck stamped his ideals on 'Vic' in its formative years. From here, the narrative moves smoothly and thematically forward, converging, among other topics: the affiliation with UWO's medical school; nursing education; conflicts over hospital privileges for doctors who were not on the honorary attending staff; the development of satellite institutions in pediatrics, cancer care and tuberculosis treatment; and the decision, wisely pushed by the provincial government, to centre future growth on a new site in the city's southern end.

A number of interesting photos adorn the manuscript, the index is adequate and the production in general is well done. On the other hand, Appendix 6, with its twenty-page list of every intern and resident at 'Vic' from 1929 to 1976, is a parochial indulgence that seems especially unfortunate when the actual text has been held to only 163 pages.

In conclusion, this book, one of the better in its genre, will probably not find a place on the shelves of many professional historians. But its clear prose, excellent organization and careful citation of primary sources make it a useful reference work that Canadian health science libraries should have on hand.

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