

CLARE PENTLAND - BRANDON COLLEGE, 1937-40

W. T. Easterbrook

The Brandon College of the late 1930's is best described as a hard-times college. The depression years had left their mark on the unimpressive collection of buildings on the outskirts of a town that had seen better days. The large expanse of grounds surrounding the college was a dusty, barren wasteland. Serious financial problems faced the administration in what seemed to be a hopeless struggle for survival. The dream of better days inspired by the prospect of a large bequest by Cyrus Eaton had ended with the world-wide collapse of 1929. Shortly after my arrival on the campus in the fall of 1937 an appeal was launched in a last-ditch attempt to save the college; the amount involved was the princely sum of \$25,000. A favorable response by a far from prosperous populace served to assure continuity of operations for at least the time being. Affiliation with the University of Manitoba in 1938 brought the prospect of permanence, but budgetary restraints continued to limit growth.

Unreserved tribute must be paid to Dr. John Evans, president of the college who, backed by his able lieutenant Stuart Perdue, must be given full credit for the college's survival in the face of the most appalling difficulties. His lifelong, unsparring devotion to his college has few, if any parallels in academic life. Plagued as he was with the problems of raising funds in depression times, he nevertheless succeeded in building a strong and able faculty. William Morton, Desmond Pacey, J.R. Mallory, Mark Long, Marten Johns — all of these made their mark in the academic field as scholars and administrators. Association with men of this calibre went far to compensate for the physical drawbacks of inadequate space and equipment.

Another source of compensation was the quality and spirit of the students I encountered. Their willingness to make the best of limited resources is among the most pleasant memories of my years in Brandon. Some came to lectures following a night shift in Brandon's mental hospital, others had spent the night in attending the college's furnace. I recall Tommy McLeod, who later graduated with distinction, thumping vigorously on the big drum of the college band. The numerous dances and festive occasions were in the main initiated by students with the will and the courage to face up to the vicissitudes of a deep and prolonged depression.

Clare Pentland was a member of a small group of Honours students who

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attended the seminars I held in a tiny cottage on the outskirts of Brandon. He impressed me from the beginning as an outstanding candidate for an academic career. A very serious, dedicated individual, he displayed a strongly creative streak in discussion and in the papers he turned in. I forwarded several of his essays to Dr. H.A. Innis of the University of Toronto in the hope that means would be found to enable Clare to proceed to more advanced studies. Unfortunately, Toronto in the 1930's had little to offer. Financial stringency, a scarcity of fellowships and a limited program of graduate studies, ruled out any prospect of assistance at that time. Nor were there any funds for the employment of graduate assistants in those days.

Other avenues of assistance were explored and finally an application to the University of Oregon was approved, enabling Clare to advance to studies at the Master's level. He had been awarded the University of Manitoba gold medal in economics at the graduation ceremonies in Brandon College and I had no doubts about his ability to make his mark in graduate studies. Later, I met him on the campus in Eugene and came away with the impression that he had experienced no difficulty in achieving high standings in his studies there. I recall that following the disaster of Pearl Harbour he faced a problem common to Canadian students studying in the United States. If not enrolled in the Canadian armed forces he was required to return to Canada in uniform. Apparently his later studies at the University of Toronto freed him from this restraint.

I regret that at this point I lost personal contact with Clare. I know, however, that in his graduate studies at the University of Toronto he maintained the high standards of his undergraduate years. As to his academic career, although I followed his progress with interest and pleasure, the pressure of teaching and administrative duties at the University of Toronto, along with frequent and prolonged bouts of travel to distant parts, prevented close acquaintance with his work. It did not surprise me that those in touch with his research held him in very high esteem. Their numerous and complimentary references to his major contributions to labour economics attest to the quality of his publications. It was fitting that he was chosen to represent Canada at several meetings of the International Economic History Association.

I treasure the memory of Clare Pentland, undergraduate. That he lived up to the promise of those years is a source of gratification to those who watched his progress. His death means the loss to Canadian scholarship of a man of exceptional quality of mind and independence of thought.

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