

**Assumption College: The O'Connor Years 1870-1890.** MICHAEL POWER. Volume II of *A Documentary History of Assumption College*. Windsor: Assumption University, 1986. xvi, 160 p. illus. ISBN 0-9691586-4-5 \$10.00.

Assumption College, later Assumption University, has had a long and distinguished history. From its opening in 1857 until its transfer to the Community of St. Basil in 1870, however, the college was unable to overcome its financial difficulties and failed to become established as a seminary for the Roman Catholic Diocese of London. A remarkable young priest named Denis O'Connor radically changed the situation with his appointment as the first president of the college. His ability was further recognized by his later appointments as Bishop of London in 1890 and Archbishop of Toronto in 1899. Yet, this second volume in *A Documentary History of Assumption College* is more than a group of documents about Denis O'Connor, as important a personality as he was in the college's history. His tenure in office at Assumption is more the common ground of the work than its subject. *The O'Connor Years* also demonstrates that documentary publishing can be carried out successfully at the local level.

The book is divided into five chapters and an appendix, all of which document different individuals and areas of activity associated with Assumption at some point during the O'Connor years. The twenty-one year span is the core of the work, with documentation continuing on to the end of the nineteenth century. Chapter I, "Father Denis O'Connor and Some of His Contemporaries," comes closest to the actual title of the book, and yet not does fulfill it as the dates of the documents are 1868-1877. Excellent coverage of the political dimensions and notion of authority within a religious community is given in O'Connor's outward correspondence with his superior in France. The parish demography, college development, and local events and individuals are discussed on the same page with references to the Franco-Prussian War, the character of Garibaldi, and other wider subjects. Chapter II, "Memories of Assumption in 1888" by Fr. Charles Collins, gives the reminiscences of an alumnus and later faculty member of Assumption College. Written in 1926, this chapter documents *la vie quotidienne* at the college in the later years of the O'Connor presidency. Chapter III, "Selections from the Diary of Father Michael Mungovan, 1890-1895," shows the transition period at the time of O'Connor's departure to London and Fr. Daniel Cushing's appointment as the college's second president. Once again local observations are combined with larger events. One such example is the 1891 Dominion election, and Mungovan's observation that part of Edward Blake's reasons for not standing for re-election included the fact that "He is of the opinion that neither the National Policy, nor commercial Union with the United States, is the solution of the problem Canada finds herself face to face with." Political events and personalities form an important part of Chapter IV, "Father Ferguson and Some of His Contemporaries." Michael Joseph Ferguson was well-connected to the federal Tories, a fact clearly reflected in the documents selected for this chapter. Personal letters from Sir John A. Macdonald and J.C. Patterson show Ferguson's loyalty and "personal exertions" for the party. Later correspondence reveals the esteem in which Ferguson was held by O'Connor and P.F. Cronin, editor of the *Catholic Register*. Chapter V, the final chapter, is a selection of newspaper stories about the college, its students and faculty, and Denis O'Connor for the period of 1877-1890. Articles are taken from *The Home Journal*, *Amherstburg Echo*, and *Detroit Free Press*. The appendix consists of three letters, one each to or from the first three presidents of Assumption College. A glossary of names provides the reader with the names, dates, and positions of major characters dealt with in the documents and a

thorough index is very useful as well. The style of transcription is modern rather than literal; the sense of the documents, however, remains intact. Power's statement on the editing of Collins' reminiscences can be applied to the whole work. As he writes in the Introduction, "It may have lost some of its "bucolic" flavour..." but "no amount of rearranging could ever rob this memoir of its originality" or of "its unquestionable historical value."

If there is a problem with the work, it lies in the lack of explanation for the selection of documents. Publication can be seen as the highest form of appraisal, but the logic of the evidential or informational value of the record does not always speak to the reader. The selection of O'Connor's outward correspondence in and of itself does nothing to tell the reader that the man burned all of his incoming correspondence, a frequent practice of Basilians of the day. Some attention is given to the choice of an Assumption University Archives draft of Collins' reminiscences over another edition preserved at the University of St. Michael's College Archives in Toronto.

Having said that, there is an undeniable chronological and indeed logical flow to the book which reveals itself in the reading. It commences with O'Connor's early years, going to the late years of his presidency through the eyes of a student, considering the transition as witnessed by Mungovan, demonstrating the political and personal dimensions of religious life particularly through Ferguson's correspondence, pulling the entire chronology together through newspaper stories and in a brilliant but again unexplained selection, introducing the reader to the second and third presidents of the college in the appendix, thus foreshadowing future volumes.

This work represents Michael Power's first serious attempt at historical editing. Already known as an author of narrative works on institutions, individuals, and events in the history of Roman Catholic Ontario, the Assumption University Archivist has added another form of historical publication to his credit. The book is readable, informative, and, most importantly, succeeds in capturing the atmosphere of the period and place. *The O'Connor Years* is more than just a collection of documents on a religious theme. It very clearly demonstrates the value of the record in documenting the dynamic interplay of personalities and events at the local level, with the national, and even international levels. Dissemination of information contained in the records will advance knowledge of Assumption University and its archives.

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