

A Journey Through the History of Humber College

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Over the past few weeks, I have been regularly visiting the Humber College Archives Office (the Archives). The Archives is constituted of the "documentary heritage of the College" (Humber College, n.d., para. 2). I first visited the Archives as I desired to take on an extracurricular research project. A presentation on the history of the grounds of Humber's Lakeshore Campus. A significant portion of the Lakeshore Campus is situated on the site of a former psychiatric hospital. The hospital has been known by a few titles, including Mimico Asylum and Lakeshore Psychiatric Hospital. I was first greeted by John Yolkowski, Humber's Archivist, who informed me that the Archives had little information on the hospital. Instead of continuing my research elsewhere, I decided to inquiry of the history of Humber College. As John narrated the history of the College, a passionate curiosity was awakened. A visit that was meant to be a mere few minutes long extended to well over an hour. The idea for a presentation on the history of the psychiatric hospital transformed into a desire to journey through the history of Humber College.

But why? Why study any history, in any capacity? A friend once expressed to me the value of "travelling the world", as he paraphrased a quote he heard sometime ago—*we travel not to learn of another's culture, but to learn of our own*. I would argue the same of history: *we learn of the past to learn of ourselves*.

I have had the pleasure of reading through a myriad of materials in the Archives: newspaper articles, dozens of photographs, yearly calendars, course guides—as well as a vulgar counterculture student publication—, all spanning through the past fifty years of Humber's history. Now John has generously granted me permission to take on loan an important piece from the Archives. A rare book titled *Past and Presence: A History of Humber College*, written by Walt McDayter (1981), a retired professor of Journalism. The foreword of *Past and Presence* is

written by Edward S. Jarvis, the first Chairman of Humber's Board of Governors. It is in that foreword that Jarvis preemptively answers the question: *why read the history of Humber College?*

Jarvis begins the foreword by reiterating his words from the initiating calendar of Humber's first school year—1967-1968. His words are as follows:

"This message is addressed to you who are to be the first students of Humber College. During this first year of the [C]ollege, you will be establishing the traditions which will be the guide to all those who will succeed you in this institution in the future (Jarvis, 1967, p. 8).

This statement was addressed to Humber's first students, but it applies to all students. Students of his time, of my time, of all time. Being a "student" is not merely a period of liminality as one endeavors to transition into their first, second, or third career. Being a student is a career in itself. It is the student who is responsible for engaging with the reciprocal relationship with faculty and administration; for the benefit of the College as it progresses through the phases of its evolution. The College is a highly complex organism—the student shapes the heart of it.

The question then becomes: *are students aware of their role in shaping the heart of an ever-evolving institution? Are students aware of their value as the life force flowing through the institution's veins?* Sadly, I believe many students lack this awareness.

That is the value of studying the history of an institution. The journey through the history of Humber College may not only enlighten students to their true identity within the College. But may also inspire a profound appreciation of that identity. Jarvis also articulates a guiding vision for the career of each generation of students—"[...] *you will be establishing traditions which will be the guide to all those who will succeed you [...]* This may seem a heavy responsibility which I

lay upon you, but my hope is that you will all rise to the challenge" (Jarvis, 1967, p. 8).

In the concluding paragraph of his foreword to *Past and Presence*, Jarvis expresses the importance of creating a history of the College:

"It was suggested even in those very early days of the institution's life that a history of the [C]ollege be initiated as soon as possible to capture the spirit of the sixties, and to celebrate the first successes of the [C]ollege, as well as admit to some of our failures. Knowledge of those successes and failures would be of equal importance to those who follow, since the ultimate justification for the history of an institution is, at best, to light the way along the pathway for future travellers, and at the very least, to enable those who are to come to avoid some of the pitfalls of the past. If [*Past and Presence: a History of Humber College*] achieves any of this, it will have been a worthwhile endeavour (Jarvis, 1981, p. 7).

In the first year of the College, Jarvis established the guiding vision for the career of the student. It is in the history of Humber where we see each generation of students achieve their own unique fulfillment of that vision. As the heart of the College is shaped by its students, it is the achievements of past students which illuminate the path of future students, as we endeavour towards our own successes, development, and individuation.

Within the totality of Humber's history, my desire to journey through its heritage, and share my discoveries and insights with peers, highlights my own fulfillment of the career of the student. In writing this piece, I am actively participating in the ongoing creation of the College's rich history. A copy of this article will be catalogued in the Archives for future students to enjoy. As I have enjoyed the inspiring and enlightening words of many of Humber's historical figures,

such as Edward S. Jarvis, Walt McDayter, Gordon Wragg (first president of Humber), John McCarthy (former student of Journalism, newspaper columnist, and president of Humber's Student Union), as well as the Honourable William G. Davis (former Minister of Education and Premier of Ontario).

It is an honour to participate in the history of Humber College.

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References

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