

York University: The Way must be Tried By Michiel Horn

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Volume 101, Number 2, Fall 2009

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1065629ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1065629ar>

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Publisher(s)

The Ontario Historical Society

ISSN

0030-2953 (print)

2371-4654 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Montague, S. (2009). Review of [*York University: The Way must be Tried By Michiel Horn*]. *Ontario History*, 101(2), 266–268.
<https://doi.org/10.7202/1065629ar>

workers are ignored altogether. Union activities are described throughout the book as unmitigated goods, but the administrative rigidities, confrontational mindsets and role they might have played in the downfall of the Big Three manufacturers—**General Motors, Ford and Chrysler—are not discussed.** Anastakis further asserts several times that Henry Ford and labour leaders (who otherwise despised each other) were able to create economic prosperity by making sure that car workers' wages enabled them to buy back their products, but fails to raise the classical rebuttal to this perspective. Does this imply that the makers of cheap dresses should get paid only enough to buy back their products too? Or should Cadillac assembly line workers have been paid more than their colleagues who assembled Ford Crestline convertibles? In the end, of course, the high purchasing power of Canadian car workers reflected their capacity to produce efficiently consumer goods for which there was a real market demand. Overcompensating workers (and managers) who failed to deliver a car for a price anybody was willing to pay could only result in the demise of their employers and the rise of competitors, mostly non-unionized.

Another recurring theme in Anastakis' narrative is the environmental and safety problems created by the car industry—from noise, smoke and rapidly increasing numbers of deaths among children in the early days to global warming concerns in the present age. But while these are serious issues, one could also argue that the true measure of technological advances should be their capacity to create problems of less consequence than those they were meant to address. In this light, it seems hard to argue with the fact that the provision of early cars was a net improvement over dealing with horses' excrement, decaying bodies, and the large amounts of land required to feed them and provide them with bedding, even when they were not working.

Ideological differences aside, *Car Nation* is an enjoyable book to read, in no insignificant part because of the quality of its production and abundant illustrations. The author has also had the good sense of providing a comprehensive list of related sites and museums that Canadian car history aficionados will appreciate.

Pierre Desrochers, University of Toronto at Mississauga

York University: The Way must be Tried

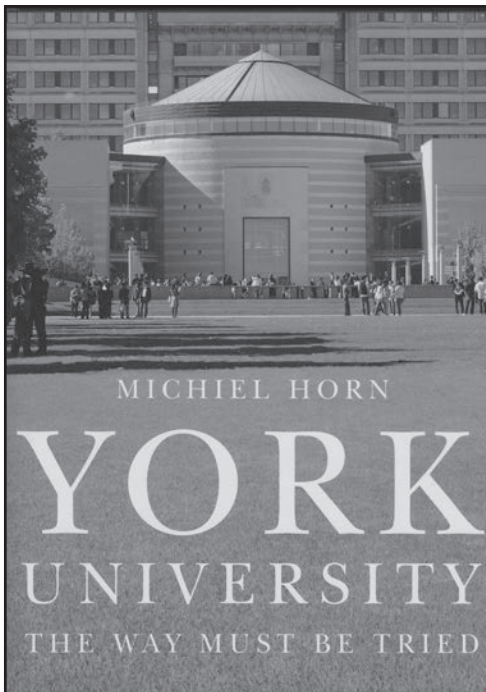
By Michiel Horn

Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2009. xii + 316 pages. \$49.95 hardcover. ISBN 978-0-7735-3416-2 (www.mqup.ca)

Michiel Horn's meticulously detailed history of York University is a fitting tribute to the institution's fiftieth anniversary. Commissioned by former York president Lorna Marsden in 2002, this lavishly illustrated book is both a factual and an anecdotal narrative tracing the origins of the university as a dream of North Toronto citizens, built

on a farmer's field, to its current prominence as one of Canada's largest and most diverse universities.

This book joins a corpus of university histories stretching from Victoria to St. John's, the majority of which deal with much older and longer-established institutions. Horn, Professor Emeritus of History, himself



witnessed much of the history that he chronicles. In his preface to the substantial volume, he acknowledges the challenge these factors presented: “The university was still young, making historical perspective difficult if not impossible. Moreover, I doubted that I was the right person to be York’s historian. Having been a member of the faculty since 1968, I would find it hard to adopt a dispassionate point of view.” (p. ix)

Horn was persuaded to persevere with the full support of the late Kent Haworth, York’s archivist, and the Board of Governors. The result, after some six years of research, interviews and writing, is a comprehensive and attractive treatment of York’s creation and meteoric development. Anyone who has an affiliation with the university, an interest in the modern history of Toronto, or curiosity about the evolution of post-secondary education over the past half-century will find a wealth of information in this book.

Indeed, if there is any criticism to be made of Horn’s latest opus (for he is a distinguished historian with a considerable body of work), it is the level of detail that he includes: blow-by-blow descriptions of board and senate meetings, the internal workings of various committees and faculties, the minutiae of numerous studies and reports, and the mention of countless individual York employees, whether or not they played a significant role in the life of the university. It is, unquestionably, an admirably complete documentary record that is bound to be of great value to the institution itself. Much more engaging for the casual reader (though arguably less historical) are the insights he provides into the personalities and passions of the founders and builders of the institution; the conversations he reports with a wide variety of alumni, faculty, staff and administrators; and his interpretation of the political forces at work both inside and outside the university over the course of its development.

Enhanced by this ‘colour commentary,’ Horn leads the reader through nearly 300 pages relating the early years of York’s establishment under the protection of the University of Toronto and its rapid growth and independence, first at Glendon College and then on the Keele campus at the (initially) remote northern edge of the city. He helps us to understand and appreciate the many dedicated people and their achievements over just five decades that transformed York into one of this country’s major universities. Most institutions of higher learning have required a great deal more time to reach fruition. Educational philosophy, administrative policy, faculty development, labour unrest, extracurricular activities, financial difficulties and advances in research and scholarship are among the topics featured. From its roots as something of an experiment in liberal arts education, bilingual programming and accessibility for first generation students, York has

solidly and effectively burgeoned into a comprehensive university on its way to a place on the international stage. As Horn concludes, “York has grown, sometimes according to plan, sometimes haphazardly, sometimes in response to external forces, but almost always in the spirit of ‘*Tentanda Via*, the way must be tried.” (p. 261)

Taken from Virgil, *tentanda via* was the successful submission from Richview Collegiate student John Court to the university’s motto contest. Court won a \$300 scholarship to York and became one of the first 76 students to enroll in 1960. (Interestingly enough, York celebrated its silver anniversary in 1985, commemorating the start of classes. Its golden anniversary, 24 years later in 2009, marks the passage of the York University Act by the Ontario legislature in 1959.) The motto seems as apt for York today as it did when

it was chosen almost 50 years ago.

The volume includes numerous archival photographs, most in black and white, and many beautiful contemporary ones in colour by Vincenzo Pietropaolo, depicting campus architecture and student life. The text is well footnoted and complemented by an index of names and four very useful appendices: a list of those interviewed or engaged in correspondence; a list of significant officers of the institution and those holding special honours; a list of research centres and institutes; and a list of buildings with their dates of construction and the architects who designed them.

Overall, Horn’s fiftieth anniversary history of York University is an impressive effort and was clearly a labour of love.

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