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ON DETERMINING THE SENIORITY OF CANADIAN UNIVERSITIES

A MARSHAL OF CONVOCATION listing Canadian universities in order of seniority, and using data found in various volumes of the *Commonwealth Universities Yearbook*, could be excused if he found the task so bewildering that he compromised by using an alphabetical arrangement. For example, he would see on page 525 of the 1939 edition of the *Yearbook* that the University of New Brunswick was founded in 1859; in the 1951 edition (page 658) that the date of founding was 1800; in the 1955 edition (page 847) that the university was "established" in 1787; and in the 1957 edition (page 893) that it was established in 1787 and incorporated in 1828. While these dates are to some extent placed in context elsewhere in these publications—and on page 128 of the Canadian Universities Foundation handbook, *Canadian Universities and Colleges, 1960*, where it is stated that teaching at university level began in 1820 and that the first degrees were awarded in 1828—the confusion over the selection of a specific date still remains.

The University of New Brunswick is not alone in pushing back its beginnings. An examination of the 1939 and 1960 editions of the *Commonwealth Universities Yearbook* shows that the date of founding of Acadia University is given as two years later in the latter publication, Bishop's University ten years, Dalhousie University three years, the University of King's College thirteen years, the Université de Montréal two years, the University of Ottawa eighteen years, St. Francis Xavier University thirteen years, and the University of Toronto sixteen years. Dates for certain other institutions remained the same during the period, while the entry for one, Mount Allison University, gives the reader of the 1960 *Yearbook* a choice, indicating that the university was "founded in 1858; previously established as Mount Allison Wesleyan Academy, 1840". The Mount Allison calendar explains that 1840 was the year during which the cornerstone of the academy was laid. The academy opened in 1843, the year of founding that is given for it in the 1960 edition of *Canadian*

Universities and Colleges.

An examination of the altered dates for the nine institutions noted previously shows that the majority of dates in the 1939 *Yearbook* were those on which degree-granting charters or other acts of incorporation were issued. The earlier dates in the 1960 edition are mostly those on which the institutions or their antecedents were initially founded, opened, or proposed, as indicated in the following table:

Institution	Data in <i>Commonwealth Universities Yearbook</i>			
	1960 edition		1939 edition	
	Date of founding	Event	Date of founding	Event
Acadia	1838	Founded as Queen's College (opened 1839)	1840	Act giving degree powers
Bishop's	1843	Founded (opened 1845)	1853	Royal Charter with degree powers
Dalhousie	1818	Founded	1821	Act of incorporation
King's	1789	Provincial act	1802	Royal Charter with degree powers
Montréal	1876	Founded as a branch of Université Laval	1878	Instruction began
New Brunswick	1787	Establishment of a Provincial Academy of Arts and Sciences	1859	King's College (N.B.) reorganized as the University of New Brunswick
Ottawa	1848	College of Bytown opened	1866	Act giving university powers
St. Francis Xavier....	1853	Founded and opened	1866	Act giving university powers
Toronto	1827	Royal Charter for King's College	1843	Teaching at King's College commenced

Whereas painstaking historical research may account for some of the revised dates, others may well be explained by the less prosaic factors of rivalry for seniority and of prestige rightly or wrongly associated with antiquity. The confusion is compounded by varying uses of the terms "founded" and "established" (somewhat akin to "conception" and "birth") and is added to still further by the fact that many present-day institutions were not born with their now current names, having evolved from other legally incorporated colleges or schools which may or may not have offered college-level work. The term "founded" might well be changed for more specific references, as will be suggested in the course of this paper. The dates for certain universities could be pushed back still more if the date on which the first suggestion of the establishment of an institution were used as the date of founding. The view has been put forward that this procedure would date the University of New Brunswick and the University of King's College from the same year, 1783, one year before the province of New Brunswick existed as a distinct entity.

The events commemorated by the various dates of founding seem to fall into four main groups. They are (1) the year in which the first activity relating to the formation of a college commenced; (2) the year of a charter or other legal authority for establishment; (3) the year in which instruction (more commonly college-level instruction) was first given; and (4) the year in which degrees were first granted.

Generally speaking, these events will occur in the above sequence, although in the case of the University of Manitoba degrees were granted some years before instruction was given by the university proper. The now defunct University of Halifax was chartered, as was Manitoba initially, as an examining institution on the pattern of the University of London. It granted seven earned degrees from 1878 to 1880 to students studying at other institutions, but ceased operation without giving any course work itself. In the case of Acadia University, college-level instruction began before a charter was obtained: the bill of incorporation was at first defeated in the provincial House of Assembly.

Perhaps the most common practice has been to date an institution from the time it, or its more or less immediately antecedent institution, was established. One noted university in the United States has traced its origin in this fashion back to an academy, presumably a secondary school. In so doing it improved its seniority among American universities by one place. A further improvement resulted from

dating the beginning from the projected establishment of an elementary charity school some years earlier.

A more definite measure of antiquity for degree-granting institutions would be to date them from the time a degree-granting charter was first issued. This would remove problems resulting from measuring age from the time of establishment of schools of less than college level, but would in turn introduce other problems. The granting of such a charter has been no guarantee that college-level instruction and degrees followed immediately. For example, legislative authority for the establishment of a University of British Columbia was given in 1890. The act was amended in 1891. In the same year it was judged to have lapsed. A new act in 1908, with some amendments, was the basis for the opening of the university in 1915. Degrees were first granted in 1916. The date of founding in the 1960 *Commonwealth Universities Yearbook* is given as 1908.

An examination of the origin of some of the older Canadian universities shows that their relative position with regard to age varies according to the measure used.

Dalhousie University began as Dalhousie College. Lord Dalhousie and his council had apparently agreed in 1817 to establish the institution. In 1818 royal assent was given for the use of money earned through customs duties, and in the same year land was obtained and a board of governors chosen. A grant of money was made by the provincial legislature in 1819, and in 1820 the cornerstone of a building was laid. The building was ready in 1823. A bill to incorporate the Governors of the college passed on January 13, 1821, but college-level teaching did not begin until 1838 for various political and other reasons. In March, 1841, an act of the Nova Scotia legislature authorized degree-granting powers for the college. After 1843, college-level teaching ceased until 1863, when a new act was passed and teaching resumed. Degrees were first awarded in 1866, although there is evidence that in the period from 1838 to 1843 some students reached a level corresponding to an M.A. from a Scottish university.

McGill University owes its origin to a will made in 1811 by James McGill, who bequeathed land and money for the establishment of a university or college. He died in 1813, but arguments over the disposition of the estate led to a delay in establishing the institution. A Royal Charter was granted for the university on

March 31, 1821, but further disputes delayed the opening until 1829. The first degree (in medicine) was conferred in 1833.

McGill's date of founding is usually given as 1821, while Dalhousie's is 1818. Is Dalhousie University older? In 1818 Dalhousie had money and land, but McGill had this at least in theory in 1813. Although the act of incorporation for Dalhousie pre-dates McGill's Royal Charter by two months, teaching began earlier and degrees were awarded over thirty years earlier at McGill than at Dalhousie. The fact that assets were actually available appears to be the main reason why Dalhousie can be considered older.

If age is to be measured from the time land was given, or from the time initial attempts were made to found an institution, then the University of Toronto can lay claim to a date before 1800. In the 1790's the Lieutenant-Governor of Ontario, Colonel Simcoe, attempted to found a university, and in 1798 the executive government of Upper Canada caused land to be set aside for education. Much later, part of this land became the basis for the endowment of the University of Toronto. It was not until 1827, however, that legislation was passed for the establishment of a university, King's College. While this year is used as its date of founding by Toronto, it was not until 1843 that King's began teaching. The first degrees were awarded in 1844. In 1850 an act of 1849 came into force which changed the form of King's College and began the University of Toronto under that name.

If the date of a charter is considered as a measure of age, one might conceivably argue that the University of Saskatchewan was founded not in 1907 but in 1883 when a Dominion act authorized the incorporation of a University of Saskatchewan in the Anglican Diocese of Saskatchewan. While this institution did not materialize in its fully-envisioned state, Emmanuel College as a college of the university gave instruction from that time (and even earlier), sometimes functioning at college level and sometimes functioning only at an elementary level as an Indian school. After the act of 1907 creating the present University of Saskatchewan, Emmanuel College gave up any claim to the same name and became the first theological college affiliated with the new university.

The foregoing remarks regarding Saskatchewan do not appear to give much evidence for dating the university earlier than 1907. However, the university had another predecessor of sorts. In 1903 an act was passed authorizing the creation of

a university for the North-West Territories. While a paper institution thus existed, it also did not function, and the 1903 act was replaced in 1906 and 1907 by acts creating the present Universities of Alberta and Saskatchewan. It should be noted that neither Alberta nor Saskatchewan lays claim to a date of founding before 1906 or 1907, although there would seem to be much more justification for dating the two from 1903 than there would be for dating the University of New Brunswick, and King's College in Nova Scotia, from 1783 when a memorial was first presented requesting the creation of a college in Nova Scotia.

For some years there has been a dispute between the University of New Brunswick and the University of King's College as to which is the oldest university in Canada. Laying aside any claim which the Université Laval may have to the title (it was founded by Royal Charter in 1852 through the efforts of authorities of the Séminaire de Québec, which dates back to the seventeenth century), and without purporting to settle the argument one way or the other, the facts supporting the rival claims are as follows.

In 1785 the Council of New Brunswick was presented with a memorial requesting a charter of incorporation for an "Academy or School of Liberal Arts and Sciences". In 1786 the Council instructed that revenue from the sale of certain lands was to be applied to and for the use of an academy or college to be erected and supported at Fredericton. A draft of a proposed charter—apparently now lost—modelled after that of King's College at New York (now Columbia University) was drawn up but was not passed. It appears that teaching was first undertaken at the academy in 1787. Attempts were made in that year to engage a master. Legislative grants were certainly made during the 1790's.

Letters patent, including degree powers, were issued by the Lieutenant-Governor of the province in 1800 for a College of New Brunswick which, it is argued, was the reconstituted academy, although a separate preparatory school seems to have functioned after 1800. The first president of the college, the Reverend James Somerville, was appointed in 1820, after having served since 1811 as principal preceptor of an "academy or public seminary of learning in Fredericton" which may or may not have been the old academy. In 1828 the letters patent of the College of New Brunswick were replaced by a Royal Charter creating King's College, New Brunswick, and in 1859 this King's College was transformed, again by legislation, into the University of New Brunswick.

While it is apparent that college-level work was given by some if not all of the predecessors of the university before 1859, one definite fact being that degrees were first granted in 1828 by the College of New Brunswick, the university's claim to seniority as an institution giving college-level instruction seems to depend on two factors: whether such instruction was given by the Provincial Academy; and if this was the case, whether or not the university can trace its lineage directly back through King's College and the College of New Brunswick to the Provincial Academy. The letters patent of 1800 imply that the land granted to the academy was given over to the college, although, as noted, the academy may have existed after 1800. With regard to college-level teaching, an official publication of the university states that it began in 1820.

College-level teaching had commenced at King's College in Nova Scotia some years earlier. The first suggestion for a college in Nova Scotia was made in 1783 when a memorial was sent by a group of Loyalist clergymen in New York to Sir Guy Carleton. In 1787 the Nova Scotia Legislature voted a sum of money for an academy which was opened at Windsor in 1788. In 1789 an act was passed for "founding, establishing, and maintaining a college", also at Windsor. The academy and the college, although closely related, seem to have been separate entities, although the second principal of the academy was also appointed the first principal of the college in 1790. No list of students at the college has survived for the period up to 1802, the year in which a Royal Charter was granted, although it has been stated that about 200 persons entered one or both institutions before 1802. The charter included reference to degree-granting powers, and degrees were probably first granted within a year or two after it came into force.

Being initially restricted to adherents of the Church of England, and controlled essentially by the government, King's was opposed by other religious denominations, and as a result a goodly number of colleges was founded in the province before the sectarian exclusiveness and government control of King's ceased. Numerous attempts to unite these institutions, especially King's with Dalhousie, failed, although King's moved to Halifax in 1923 and became "associated" with Dalhousie University.

King's College seems to have had a continuous existence since 1789 and is today the only one of the three Canadian institutions to keep the name "King's College" given by Royal Charter. While the College of New Brunswick was authorized to grant degrees two years before King's College at Windsor, King's granted degrees much earlier, and was operating as a college at an earlier date still.

Conformity in the use of dates of founding among institutions is desirable. It is somewhat incongruous that the beginning of an institution of higher education can be claimed to be much earlier than a formal provision for such a level of study.

If the discussion is confined to degree-granting institutions, certainly the fact that earned degrees were awarded is an indication that studies at the college level were in fact being pursued. Indeed, the year in which earned degrees were first granted by an institution is probably the most accurate indication that it was in truth operating as its charter authorized it to operate. There would have been little justification for the existence of the early University of Manitoba, or for the University of Halifax, if they had not granted degrees.

In the case of non-degree granting institutions, other evidence of college-level instruction should be present. For example, Pictou Academy in Nova Scotia was chartered in 1816, but because of political and religious squabbles was not given degree-granting powers. For this reason it seems to have been named an academy rather than a college. Yet in a few years three of its students wrote and successfully passed University of Glasgow degree examinations on the basis of the work they had taken at Pictou. This would certainly indicate that Pictou Academy was, shortly after its start, giving work equal to degree work at other institutions, just as are many colleges today that are affiliated with degree-granting universities. Indeed, the president of the academy was made president of Dalhousie College in 1838.

Similarly, with junior colleges, there should be evidence that their work was accepted for advanced standing by other institutions. The records of the University of Halifax indicate that Prince of Wales College in Charlottetown was probably giving college-level instruction in the 1870's.

While it may be fairly readily determined if instruction given in the twentieth-century was of college level, it is doubtful if complete agreement could be reached on instruction given in 1850, or 1800, or earlier, unless an extensive amount of comparative research is undertaken. If for any reason this cannot be done, and if it is realized that requests for a charter, and even the granting of a charter, do not necessarily imply that college work was a direct result, then the only common ground for assessing the year in which a university began to function under the actual terms of its incorporation is the year in which earned degrees were first awarded.

Seniority for institutions of higher education in convocation processions might be determined by having two groups arranged as follows: (1) degree-granting institutions by the year in which earned degrees were first awarded; and (2) non-degree granting institutions by the year in which college-level studies were first undertaken.

This is not to say that charter dates should not still be used for certain purposes. They will be! Inscriptions on corner stones, on stained glass windows, and on coats of arms cannot readily be changed. Nor can ties with the past, be they romantic or otherwise. However, the dates when earned degrees were first granted and when college-level studies first began would end disputes regarding the gestation period and parenthood of various institutions, and would bring consistency of a sort to the bewildering array of dates now used in numerous publications. Charter and other dates could be indicated as well, but they should be specifically explained so that the reader understands their meaning.

While institutions in Canada and abroad are accustomed to using the date of a charter as the date of founding, and while the charter is the legal framework in which an institution operates, there is no reason why new dates could not be substituted in certain cases where seniority is to be determined. Dates used for Canadian institutions are so varied that it is reasonable to assume that dates for institutions in other countries are equally as variable. Indeed they are in the United States of America.

If the above-noted criteria were not used, then the only other reasonable course would be to determine seniority from the date of a valid charter indicating that college work was to be undertaken. Alternatively, all could be listed alphabetically.

An attempt to bring order out of the chaos of dates was made in the preparation of the Canadian Universities Foundation publication, *Canadian Universities and Colleges, 1960*. A request was made for dates of founding, of the charter, when college-level study first commenced, and when degrees were first granted. The following table shows the dates, when reported, for what are commonly considered to be the nine oldest Canadian universities. It will be seen that their rank varies according to which set of dates is used. In the table dates not relating to college-level work are omitted, and the date of founding has been narrowed to refer to specific legislation regarding the establishment of the institution, rather than to more preliminary actions.

Institution	First legislation regarding establishment of a college	First legislation mentioning degree powers	College-level work started	First degrees awarded (honorary or earned)
U. of King's College	1789	1802	1789	1802 or 1803 (?)
U. of New Brunswick	1800 ¹	1800 ¹	1820	1828
Dalhousie U.	January, 1821 ²	March, 1841 ²	1838-45, 1863	1866
McGill U.	March, 1821	March, 1821	1829	1833
U. of Toronto	1827 ³	1827 ³	1843	1844
Acadia U.	March, 1840 ^{2 4}	March, 1840 ^{2 4}	1839	1843
Queen's U.	February, 1840 ^{2 5}	February, 1840 ^{2 5}	1842	1847
Victoria U.	August, 1841 ⁶	August, 1841 ⁶	1841 ²	1845 ²

1. Legislation was for the College of New Brunswick.
2. Data from sources other than *Canadian Universities and Colleges, 1960*.
3. Legislation was for King's College in Upper Canada.
4. A bill for Queen's College in 1839 had been defeated in the assembly. In 1841 the name was changed to Acadia College.
5. Legislation was for "the University at Kingston" by an Act passed by the Parliament of Upper Canada on February 10, 1840. This Act was superseded by a Royal Charter signed on October 16, 1841, for Queen's College at Kingston.
6. A Royal Charter for Upper Canada Academy was granted in 1836 but it contained no reference to college-level work or to degree powers.

As a suggestion towards conformity for historical material to be included in yearbooks and the like, basic dates might be given as follows: (1) the date of first legislation specifically referring to the establishment of the college; (2) the date of first legislation respecting the granting of degrees; (3) the date on which college-

level work was first started; (4) the date on which first degrees were awarded by the institution or by its direct antecedents; (5) any other dates, properly explained.

While this would again give a proliferation, any given date could properly be compared with a similar date for another institution. These dates could no doubt be determined by persons at each institution concerned, and a small group of referees might settle any disputed dates. One advantage to using several indices would be that both King's and New Brunswick could justifiably claim seniority among English-language institutions on the basis of separate ones, although it appears that at least one Quebec institution was offering some college-level work at an earlier date than any claimed by either New Brunswick or King's.

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The *Dalhousie Review* has received several requests for complete or broken runs of back numbers. Many of these, especially for earlier volumes, are in short supply. Five university and institutional libraries are at present endeavouring to obtain complete files. Valued assistance for these and for individual orders has been given by a few subscribers and the *Review* will be grateful to any others who will send any copies that they may have from Vols. I-XXXI and XXXIII, No. 3, and XXXVII, No. 3. For complete runs of Vols. I-XXXIII arrangements may be made on request for purchase at an agreed equitable price.

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