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# LIBERAL EDUCATION ON THE GREAT PLAINS AMERICAN EXPERIMENTS, CANADIAN FLIRTATIONS, 1930-1950

KEVIN BROOKS

In 1929 the University of Chicago plan for liberal or general education was first proposed by its young president, Robert Maynard Hutchins. Sociologist Daniel Bell, in his history of general education in America says, "The Chicago plan sought to draw together the disciplines in three fields—the humanities, the social sciences, and the natural sciences—and to consider problems which, by their nature, could only be understood by applying concepts from different disciplines."<sup>1</sup> Hutchins' proposal became the most discussed plan for balancing university curriculums that had become spe-

cialized and disjointed in the first thirty years of the century, although it was far from being the only general education experiment of its day. The Experimental School at the University of Wisconsin and the General College at the University of Minnesota are usually identified, along with Chicago, as the three most significant general education experiments of the early 1930s.<sup>2</sup> These experimental programs served as models, in whole or in part, for reforms throughout the Great Plains region of Canada and the United States during the 1930s and 1940s.

In this essay I will identify two trends that emerge out of these initial experiments—a trend combining liberal education traditions and a trend combining liberal and professional education—and show to what extent those trends were taken up by the land-grant colleges, state universities, and provincial universities of the Great Plains. David R. Russell identifies three communities within the general education movement: those who saw utility and efficiency as the primary goal of education; those who saw culture as the primary goal; and those who saw social reform as the goal. This paper will focus primarily on

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the goals and actions of the first and second communities.<sup>3</sup> I use "liberal education" here to speak mainly of traditions in education. Twentieth-century experiments like those at Chicago, Wisconsin, and Minnesota are best described as "general education experiments" because they attempt to offer a broad or general education. They are informed, however, by the liberal education traditions extending from Greek and Roman education to nineteenth century versions of liberal education. To clarify this distinction, I am arguing that this comparison of American and Canadian schools will show that western Canadian universities were more influenced by *general education* experiments on the Great Plains than by the nineteenth-century *liberal education tradition* in eastern Canada. The term "general education" was seldom used by Canadian educational reformers, but was more common than "liberal education" in the US I will frequently refer to American general education experiments and Canadian liberal education flirtations, but the two are synonymous.

I have limited my study of American schools, besides Chicago and Minnesota, to those in Iowa, Kansas, and Nebraska because I am primarily interested in establishing educational patterns, not advancing research into the history of education or the curriculum at the American institutions. The archival research I have done in western Canada, however, will shed some new light on the nature of American educational and cultural influences on western Canada. This comparison will also show that much of the appeal of these Great Plains experiments is their similarity to a British, Arnoldian conception of higher education, an issue that may complicate our understanding of national and regional identity formation.

Before examining the general education experiments and flirtations on the Great Plains, I need to clarify what I mean by "liberal education traditions" and provide a brief account of the history of liberal education up till the twentieth century in the eastern regions of Canada and the United States. By sketching the history

of liberal education and its manifestations in nineteenth-century Canada and the United States, I will be able to formulate more clearly the questions that need to be asked about general education on the Great Plains.

#### LIBERAL EDUCATION IN THE EAST

Bruce Kimball's *Orators & Philosophers* argues that two distinct traditions of liberal education have, at various times, guided education in the western societies. Liberal education in the Hellenic and Roman worlds was for the orator, the free citizen, and the curriculum that came to characterize this education—the seven liberal arts—was called the *artes liberales*. Students educated in the oratorical tradition were not encouraged to discover new knowledge but to support the knowledge and values of the ruling class to which they belonged. Not until the Enlightenment and the re-emergence of the philosophical tradition of education in the form of science did liberal education take on the notion of being able to set its pupils free through knowledge. Socrates and Plato represented the philosophical tradition of education in classical times, while Isocrates represented the dominant oratorical tradition. Eighteenth-century university students in Europe and North America were still educated in the *artes liberales* and still admired the ancients, Kimball says, "But their 'folk-hero' was Socrates with his uncompromising, never-ending search for truth." In contrast to the *free-citizen* of the classical period replicating the values and knowledge of the ruling class, Enlightenment *free-thinkers* challenged conventional wisdom about science and society. The philosophical ideal of education eventually began to influence university curriculums by demanding more attention be paid to the sciences, but those demands were still made in the name of "liberal education" generally.<sup>4</sup>

Nineteenth century North American universities matured during the time when educators were divided about the purpose of a liberal education: to inculcate traditional values and truths—the oratorical tradition—or to seek new

truths and the clarification of values—the philosophical tradition. The Yale Report of 1828, for example, was a defense of the oratorical tradition and the classical curriculum against the onslaught of demands for practical and popular education informed by the philosophical tradition.<sup>5</sup> Canadian historians of education, most notably A. B. McKillop, argue that this tension was not an important part of postsecondary education in nineteenth-century Anglo Canada—“Virtually all English-speaking educators in British North America at mid-nineteenth century agreed that the prime function of education was to instil into their students sound principles of morality.” Allan Smith argues that challenges to the traditional curriculum in Canada were made in the name of the stereotypically American myth of the self-made man.<sup>6</sup> What McKillop and Smith agree on is that Canada and the United States were both influenced by Scottish educators and their Common Sense philosophy in the first half of the nineteenth century and by Hegelian and Arnoldian idealism in the second half of the century.<sup>7</sup> But where nineteenth and early twentieth century Hegelian and Arnoldian thought in eastern Canada largely curtailed the scientism, pragmatism, and materialism that Canadians perceived to be dominating American education, idealism in the US was isolated primarily to the eastern states and traditional old schools like Yale and Princeton, or to isolated pockets like the Hegelians of the St. Louis School.<sup>8</sup> The pursuit of knowledge for its own sake, shunned in Canadian universities, became the mission of graduate education at Johns Hopkins and other American institutions. Liberal education of the oratorical tradition held its ground in Canada; liberal education of the philosophical tradition made great inroads at the research schools in the United States.

These characterizations of dominant trends in nineteenth-century education often become, particularly for Canadian scholars like Emberley and Newell and Hubert, representative of all of Canadian education. Emberley and Newell and Hubert see the hegemony of

Hegelian and Arnoldian thought in Canada extending through to the 1960s.<sup>9</sup> McKillop, however, is more sensitive to the turbulent and transitional conditions of a westward expanding Canada:

The English-Canadian university of the first quarter of the twentieth century, like the society itself, was one in a state of precarious balance between the weight of tradition and the currents of change. Hence, the academic could no longer be certain whether his role was to safeguard social stability or to facilitate social improvement. The first quarter of the twentieth century was not generally a happy time to be in Canadian academic life.<sup>10</sup>

One can certainly see vestiges of tradition in the curriculum and arrangement of the provincial universities of western Canada, but significant attempts to provide a general education in western Canada, I will argue, were largely influenced by American experiments and not nineteenth-century Canadian traditions of oratorical liberal education. After the turbulent quarter century or more that McKillop describes, the North American impulse toward general education and liberal culture characterizes the reform, experimentation, and flirtation with liberal education in western Canada.

What I am arguing, then, is that regional differences in twentieth-century Canada parallel regional differences in the US that were already visible at the end of the nineteenth century. Veysey contrasts Midwestern and Eastern schools:

By 1890 a distinctive Midwestern educational spirit was coming into being. Utility became a rallying cry in a regional rebellion. The East Coast was pictured as standing for books, tradition, and “culture,” in an effete, undesirable sense. The West, in contrast, meant action, practicality, realism, and progress. College studies, it was held, should reflect the difference of environment.<sup>11</sup>

This regional difference is clear and well documented in the United States. Edward Eddy, Jr.'s, history of the land-grant colleges suggests that the agriculture and mechanic colleges were founded in the philosophical tradition of the pursuit of knowledge, but they broke with the spirit of liberal education generally in their attempt to be utilitarian. The Morrill Act provided for "at least one college where the leading object shall be without excluding other scientific and classical studies, and including military tactics, to teach such branches of learning as are related to agriculture and the mechanic arts."<sup>12</sup> There was no attempt to fuse classical and practical training; they could, if possible, co-exist. The pursuit of knowledge at land-grant colleges was not for the sake of knowledge itself, nor for the disciplining of the mind or spirit in the training of citizens. These colleges were drawn towards general education in the 1930s, as we shall see, but not until they had established a unique identity: providing what I call "liberal-professional education," a combining of the philosophical liberal education tradition and vocational or professional training.

It is this interest in general education on the Great Plains in the 1930s and 1940s that is the topic of this paper. The questions I am trying to answer are: "What kinds of general education reforms did schools on the Great Plains employ?" and "What traditions or schools were the models for reform?" Some of the reforms seem to have been spearheaded by traditionalists (orators), others by philosophers, but even these traditions become mixed in the twentieth century. These two questions converge sharply when one considers the history of postsecondary education in western Canada. If in fact the Universities of Saskatchewan, Alberta, and Manitoba took up the problem of providing a general education for the first time in the 1930s, what is the historical relationship between education in eastern Canada and western Canada? among schools in the American Midwest, on the American Great Plains, and in the Canadian Prairies? I think the answers to these questions will suggest that

we think of educational trends in continental and regional terms rather than simply national systems of postsecondary education.

#### AMERICAN GENERAL EDUCATION EXPERIMENTS

The three most prominent general education experiments in the Midwest during the late 1920s and early 1930s were at the University of Chicago, the Experimental School at the University of Wisconsin, and the General College at the University of Minnesota. Chicago and Minnesota in particular were looked to as models for American and Canadian schools on the Great Plains.<sup>13</sup> The state universities in Kansas and Nebraska were influenced by, or shared the same liberal culture values as Chicago, and the land-grant colleges in Iowa and Kansas had more in common with the philosophical but utilitarian program at Minnesota than with the *artes liberales* programs at Chicago. Brief vignettes of the experimental schools and the American Great Plains adaptations will provide a context for examining general education reform in Canada.

An ideal general education, according to Mortimer Adler, would not include vocational education, specialization, departments, electives, or separate courses. The faculty would be responsible for the whole curriculum. Lectures would be kept to a minimum, and when used would be general enough to address large portions of the student body. Oral exams would be used to separate "facile verbalizers and memorizers from genuine intellect," but there would be no failures. The intent of a general education would be to develop students' capacities, not to rank their abilities. This ideal was never fully realized at Chicago, but the university was reorganized into four basic divisions: the humanities, the biological sciences, the physical sciences, and the social sciences. Milton Mayer's memoir of Hutchins describes some of the other reforms that followed: "[T]he elective system was invaded by year-long general courses in the four divisional fields. The course-credit system was junked." Students took

a series of comprehensive exams, administered by an independent board of examiners, in order to receive their baccalaureate. Frederick Rudolph's history of curriculums describes the examination process in more detail:

Completion of the work of the college was measured by the passing of seven comprehensive examinations, of which five—English composition, humanities, social science, physical science, and biological science—were required. The other two comprehensive examinations were second examinations, calling for a greater depth and wider knowledge, in any two of the four general groups.

Many of the Chicago reforms were not Hutchins' ideas, but what Rudolph calls "imaginative and liberating reforms" quickly came to be associated with him and the University of Chicago. The ideals that Adler and Hutchins both wanted—the Socratic method used to learn from the greatest books of the Western world—were difficult, if not impossible to achieve at Chicago. Yet these ideas held considerable interest, if not sway, at other institutions struggling to regain an *artes liberales* curriculum after a quarter of a century of specializing in scientific or utilitarian education. The University of Chicago before Hutchins was already immersed in liberal-free education, but Hutchins, Adler, and the New Humanists of the 1930s certainly did not recognize the science curriculum as a liberal one. Adler, in "The Chicago School," explains liberal education as a critique of science: "just as Harper's Chicago reflected and formulated the 'religion of science' which dominated American culture from the nineties to the thirties, so Hutchins's Chicago, in the past ten years, has focused attention upon—more than that, has become the leading forum for—the crucial issue of our day; *whether science is enough, theoretically or practically*."<sup>14</sup>

The University of Minnesota's General College strove not for synthesis and unity of the Western tradition but an overview of that

tradition. The General College was, according to Rudolph, "a two-year program of general studies [that] addressed itself to the challenging problem of what to do for and with young men and women whom the society, with some degree of success, had labeled as losers." Edward Eddy, Jr., uses a quotation to describe the program and its students more tactfully: "In 1932 the University of Minnesota established a general college for an 'overview' of human learning, designed to fit 'the individual abilities, interests, and potentialities of a very considerable number of young people whose needs were not being met elsewhere in the University,' in the words of President Lotus D. Coffman." Although it was less grandiose in its designs, Eddy suggests that the Minnesota program had a greater appeal than Chicago's for land-grant colleges that found little relevance in Hutchins' reforms.<sup>15</sup>

Comparing Minnesota with Chicago, one can see Kimball's two liberal education traditions informing the different schools. Liberal education, as expressed by Minnesota's Dean of the College of Science, Literature, and the Arts John Johnston, is "fundamental and preparatory to professional study." Johnston sounds vaguely like Hutchins when he qualifies the importance of preparing for professional work: "[liberal education] may relate its various subject-matter to its practical or professional uses, but it must in the last analysis serve organized society by putting in its hands the knowledge necessary for human welfare." Yet Johnston's overall purpose in his book is to discover "how [a liberal college] can best perform the function for which society maintains it." In contrast, Chicago and its intellectual leaders—Hutchins and Adler—were accused, according to Rudolph, of withdrawing from society into a monastic community of scholars. If not withdrawing from society, we certainly see Adler critiquing or questioning the role of science, among other things, in contemporary society. This element of analysis and critique—a feature of liberal-free education—was one of the compromises that oratorical traditionalists were making to the demands of the modern

world in the 1930s. Among the compromises that twentieth-century inheritors of the oratorical and philosophical traditions made, Kimball specifically notes the Aristotelian, philosophical influence on Hutchins and Adler.<sup>16</sup>

When we look at these influential general education experiments from the 1930s, we see that Minnesota has combined the liberal-free ideal of education with the ideal of utility, and that Chicago has combined the oratorical and philosophical traditions of liberal education, but not for a utilitarian purpose. Minnesota provides a model for combining two distinct values, while Chicago provides a model for balancing the two historically opposed traditions of liberal education.

The direct influence of these programs is sometimes difficult to identify, but the two general patterns represented by Chicago and Minnesota can be discerned in the educational reforms or values of various Great Plains schools. Gerald Graff identifies a link between Chicago and the University of Kansas, which made significant curricular changes and adopted a Western Civilization Program in 1945. Clifford Griffin describes the Kansas curriculum.

[Students] have to pass a comprehensive examination in Western Civilization, in most cases by the end of the sophomore year. They would prepare for it not by taking courses, but by independent reading, supplemented by general weekly lectures, attendance at which would be voluntary. The reading [according to the Committee on Curriculum] was to include a "fair sampling of the outstanding classics in our political, economic, and philosophical tradition together with the best of recent commentaries to make that tradition clear."

This program outlived the Chicago Plan and, according to Griffin, "by the early 1960s the University and the College were offering about as good a liberal undergraduate education as could be found in the United States."<sup>17</sup>

The University of Nebraska had a direct tie to Chicago in Chancellor C. S. Boucher, former dean at the University of Chicago and author of *The Chicago College Plan*. R. McLaran Sawyer compares Boucher to the Chicago president: "Like Hutchins at Chicago, the chancellor of the University of Nebraska denounced those who sought a college degree for economic or social reasons." Boucher's attitude was not representative of the college, but "the potential for vocational programs at the University of Nebraska was not realized because of the economic situation and an unwillingness to discontinue established conventional academic work." In the 1940s Boucher managed to establish a "Junior Division" similar to those of Chicago and the University of Kansas, although again Boucher's views on the purpose of this program differed from the views of faculty members. Boucher saw the first two years as part of a screening process for further study, while other faculty members welcomed the change as consistent with General Education and Liberal Culture reforms across the country.<sup>18</sup>

If the state universities on the Great Plains between the 1930s and 1950s still felt a tie to traditional liberal education—whether oratorical or philosophical—the land-grant colleges saw the need to strive for or claim liberal education among their goals. Eddy notes that "a trend had developed toward more liberal than practical education" in the years that land-grant colleges began to reach maturity, 1938 to 1956. But what Eddy means by liberal education is education of the Minnesota variety: liberal-professional education. The land-grant colleges had no intention of giving up their practical and scientific applications, but increasingly participated in what Iowa State College English professor J. Raymond Derby called an "aesthetic awakening." Earle Ross describes the extra-curricular cultural life of the Ames campus, including a "Literature and Life" lecture series that brought Robert Frost to Iowa State College in 1934. Curricular changes did not involve liberal education experiments, but, Ross says, "A balanced liberalizing of the

curriculum was being made as a proper basis of the sound development of technological education and without the old fears of encroachment and neglect."<sup>19</sup>

This sense of self-assurance that practical and professional education had a rightful place within colleges and universities also characterizes the liberalizing of education at Kansas State College. James Carey says that under the leadership of Milton Eisenhower (1943-50), "the goal of the College had broadened to include development of the ability to solve theoretical as well as practical problems. . . . Eisenhower's liberal views were in keeping with the broader interpretation of the Morrill land-grant wording which had provided for an education that was both liberal and practical."<sup>20</sup> The notion of liberal education as the solving of theoretical problems suggests again that land-grant colleges drew heavily from the liberal-free or philosophical tradition of education; their ability to combine that tradition with practical education, however, is their distinctive reform: a liberal-professional education.

Frederick Rudolph's observation that Chicago, Wisconsin, and Minnesota were "models without imitators" seems questionable in light of the success of the University of Kansas' Western Civilization Program and the ability of Land-Grant Colleges like Iowa State and Kansas State to forge liberal-professional bonds. The experiments at Chicago and Minnesota also influenced the thinking of educators in western Canada. Ideologically, the Chicago Plan was very much at home in Canadian institutions that still valued British traditions and culture, but the Minnesota plan was a more realistic institutional arrangement for fledgling universities. What the Canadian flirtations with liberal education reform illustrate, however, is that liberal education in its traditional forms—whether oratorical, philosophical, or composite in nature—is not only for the free, elite, citizen, but is also primarily for the elite or financially secure university. Johnston's liberal-professional ideal of education required little or no curricular reform, but

provided a rationale for how universities could meet traditional and modern needs. As much as western Canadian institutions were caught up in the liberal education and liberal culture trends of the 1930s and 40s, those institutions could not afford to implement wide-scale liberal education reforms until the 1960s, if at all.<sup>21</sup>

#### WESTERN CANADIAN FLIRTATIONS WITH LIBERAL EDUCATION

Eastern Canada's strong oratorical liberal education traditions were not easily transplanted to western Canada. Many of the early university presidents in western Canada came from the east, but most of them saw the need to adapt their new institutions to the environment of the Great Plains. The University of Saskatchewan's Walter Murray had the strongest vision of postsecondary education among early presidents, and he clearly was a product of eastern Canadian and Scottish liberal education ideals. His inability fully to realize his liberal education goals during his twenty-eight years at Saskatchewan is indicative of the difficulty of achieving traditional oratorical liberal education values in a frontier region. R. C. Wallace, president of the University of Alberta, and Sidney Earle Smith, president of the University of Manitoba, both published their views on liberal education, the former's being a liberal-professional conception like Johnston's, the latter's a traditional *artes liberales* conception influenced by American reforms. Wallace's views, accordingly, were encouraged only mildly by E. K. Broadus, head of Alberta's English Department, while Smith's program reforms were encouraged by E. K. Brown and Roy Daniells, the English Department heads during Smith's tenure. The Manitoba reforms for liberal education resembled the Chicago plan in some ways, and got as far as being listed in the University of Manitoba catalogue for two years, but the proposed courses in Western Civilization were never offered.

The story of liberal education in western Canada is a story of flirtations with different



traditions of liberal education—eastern Canadian, liberal-professional, and American-influenced *artes liberales*—but ultimately a story of thwarted desire. What brief histories of schools throughout the Great Plains—north and south of the forty-ninth parallel—illustrate, however, is that liberal culture and the liberalizing of education generally were consistent goals of this region during the 1930s and 1940s. The liberal education values attributed to Canadian postsecondary education were by no means solely the inheritance of a British colony but also the inheritance of the many conservative educators throughout North America who wished to hold onto the notion of an education of the mind and spirit distinct from utilitarian training. And the characterization of American education as pragmatic, utilitarian, and scientific is clearly an unfair portrait of the general education experiments of the Midwest and Great Plains.<sup>22</sup> By 1930, even the “cow colleges” of Kansas State and Iowa State had reached such a level of curricular sophistication that they were recognized, at least in Canada by Wallace, as offering a liberal-professional education.<sup>23</sup>

*University of Saskatchewan.* The University of Saskatchewan’s first president, Walter Murray, was educated in the tradition of nineteenth-century Canadian and Scottish liberal education. His biographers, David and Robert Murray (no relation to Walter), summarize such speeches as “The Function of Philosophy in a Liberal Education” and “Educational Ideals” that Murray made early in his career. He had hoped to bring liberal education traditions to the prairies, but in his twenty-nine years (1908-37) as president, agriculture and the sciences were always favored as the fields that served the province. “Murray wavered in his support of the humanities because of his desire to be ‘practical’” says Michael Hayden.<sup>24</sup> The liberal education theories of eastern Canada may have informed Murray’s vision of postsecondary education in Saskatchewan, but in practice the school at Saskatoon started out

more like the land-grant colleges of the American Great Plains.

A liberal education experiment was attempted during the tenure of Saskatchewan’s second president, the Reverend J. S. Thompson (1937-49). Patricia Jasen, in her history of the liberal arts curriculum in Canada, describes Thompson as “a traditionalist who strongly resented ‘the spell which science has thrown over the minds of youth today.’” The university created three separate streams

from which students would choose when they entered the university: Language and Literature, Social Science, and Natural Science. . . . [T]he student specialized in one group of subjects and within that group took four courses in one discipline. . . . The most innovative part of this scheme was that students were required to take “General Introductory Classes” in fields outside their own group of subjects.

This arrangement was used from 1941 to 1968, but it largely worked against J. S. Thompson’s plans to introduce liberal culture to Saskatchewan: “the science category attracted over half the students, another third enrolled in the social sciences, but, in 1951, only two and a half percent of the faculty’s students were choosing to concentrate on languages and literature.”<sup>25</sup> Although these curricular reforms may be the most tangible products of the liberal education movement on the Canadian prairies, their limited success and Saskatchewan’s ensuing reputation for being a practical, scientific school overshadowed the liberal culture efforts. The failure of liberal education and Thompson’s liberal culture ideal for Saskatchewan challenges the common assumption of Emberley and Newell and Hubert that nineteenth-century values of education, formulated in eastern Canada and the eastern United States, were transplanted on the Canadian prairies. The curriculum and mission of the University of Saskatchewan, more so even than Alberta and

Manitoba, reflected the environment of the place and times.

*University of Alberta.* Henry Marshall Tory, first president of the University of Alberta (1908-28), became a close friend of President Murray from Saskatchewan. Tory, however, was trained as a scientist and did not articulate the same educational ideals of liberal culture that Murray expressed. Tory probably held liberal-free views of education; he encouraged the faculty to contribute to the advancement of knowledge through teaching and research. According to Walter Johns, himself a president of the University of Alberta in the 1960s, much of that research had an unusually practical application: it was directed toward producing texts for the university.<sup>26</sup> The early years in Alberta, as in Saskatchewan and Manitoba, were not about curricular experimentation, scientific research, or liberal culture; those years were about obtaining strong faculty members and building proper facilities to house students and staff.

Alberta's second president, R. C. Wallace (1928-36), like Saskatchewan's second president, turned the attention of the university toward liberal education. He delivered a series of lectures in 1932 entitled *A Liberal Education in a Modern World*. Wallace was no traditionalist, however, like S. J. Thompson of Saskatchewan. In these lectures he addresses the question of whether or not we can have a liberal education in this utilitarian age. He comes down primarily on the side of liberal-free education and Thomas Henry Huxley, who saw a need in education that *artes liberales* supporters like Cardinal Newman and Matthew Arnold did not see:

The need for man to understand the world in which he lives, in order to mold that world the more fully to his needs, came as a challenge which could not be dismissed. It is this viewpoint which has transformed our outlook in education and has introduced a utilitarian factor which it is our responsibility now to evaluate and appraise,

in order that we may go forward into the future with a clear understanding of the issues.

Wallace's evaluation is that science has brought the world new knowledge that, in turn, has inspired a new curriculum. In light of these developments, he poses the question of what should be included and what should be left out of a liberal, university education. His answer is: "Only if there are profound underlying principles, for this time being, it may be sensed rather than clearly enunciated, should any subject be admitted to the rank of university standing." Wallace uses this definition to justify the inclusion of engineering, agriculture, home economics, nursing, and librarianship within the university by pointing out the underlying principles of science in the first four disciplines, and the arts foundation of a degree in librarianship.<sup>27</sup>

Wallace's lectures make much the same point that John Johnston of Minnesota had made two years earlier: that liberal education, drawing from its liberal-free and *artes liberales* traditions, was not incompatible with professional education. Wallace was not arguing that universities should become training schools, but that liberal education accommodate the professions of the modern world. The land-grant colleges of the US provided a model for Wallace. He traces the development of land-grant colleges from their beginnings as "strictly technical colleges" to their present status within the university community as institutions that do research in "the sciences which underlie agriculture," among other things.<sup>28</sup> The implication of Wallace's argument is that the University of Alberta, by building the professional programs he has focused on, is moving in the right direction. Returning to a more traditional liberal arts program—whether oratorical, philosophical, or a combination—is not only unnecessary, but a mistake in the context of understanding contemporary needs.

Alberta did have traditionalists on faculty, of course, and two letters to Wallace from E. K. Broadus, graduate of Harvard and head of the

English department since the university's inception in 1908, articulate the traditionalist response to Wallace's vision. The first letter, dated 29 March 1932, fulfilled Wallace's request for "adverse criticism." Broadus takes issue with the qualifying clause in Wallace's criterion that only subjects of profound underlying principles, *sensed or enunciated*, should be included in university study.

If the "profound underlying principles" are for the time being only "sensed" (by which I suppose you mean vaguely guessed at or assumed to be some day discoverable), the given subject is not even on probation as a university subject. When the subject, by independent development has reached a point where it is seen to possess profound underlying principles susceptible of clear enunciation, the University (conceived as a *teaching body*, not as a collection of isolated investigators employed by a Research Council) can admit it into the curriculum.

Broadus says he cheerfully admits the validity of Wallace's criterion without the qualifying clause, but he also adds that "the criterion, strictly and remorselessly applied, would eliminate most of us, and transform the university into what I gladly admit it ought to be—a graduate school, presided over by philosophers of their subject."<sup>29</sup>

Both in this letter and one on 19 January 1934, Broadus openly questions the place of "Household Ec" in the university. In the later letter, he is complaining of a time change requested by the department of Household Economics that would affect English 2 (a required English course). Broadus, in mounting his argument for the priority of English in the university, cites *A Liberal Education in the Modern World* to its author, although Broadus again leaves out Wallace's qualifying clause. Broadus's dislike for Home Economics and other professional courses had little or no impact on the curriculum other than ensuring that English 2 would be a course primarily in

literary appreciation. But Broadus' attitude also clearly reflects the elitism of traditional liberal education: "I must confess that what you have to say in your later pages of the possible cultural and genuinely educational value of vocational subjects goes further than I can go—or, shall I say?, is more open-minded than I can yet bring myself to be."<sup>30</sup> Such elitism ensured the limited success, if not outright failure, of traditional liberal education reform in western Canada.

*University of Manitoba.* Founded in 1877 but not organized as a teaching institution until 1904, the University of Manitoba was actually much slower than its younger prairie counterparts to develop. Alberta and Saskatchewan both had permanent sites and buildings before Manitoba, and their dynamic first presidents—Tory and Murray—were able to attract quality staff in a way that Manitoba's first president, J. A. MacLean, was not. Historian of the University of Manitoba W. L. Morton writes that "There is no evading the conclusion that among the many disabilities of the University of Manitoba was the personal failure of its first president in character, purpose and will." Reports from two exemplary students who attended the University of Manitoba during the years 1928 to 1935 testify to the substandard teaching and scholarship of that period. Both Harry Ferns and Marshall McLuhan were attracted to professor of history H. N. Fieldhouse but found most other faculty members to be lacking in charisma and learning.<sup>31</sup>

In 1932 the complete failure of Manitoba's leadership surfaced. The honorary bursar, John A. Machray, had defalcated with almost \$1,000,000 of the university's endowment over a period of nearly thirty years. President MacLean retired shortly after this scandal, and in 1934 Sidney Earle Smith brought to Manitoba what Morton says it needed most: "confidence, leadership and presence." But Smith also brought a Chicago-like interest in liberal education. Summarizing Smith's inaugural address, Morton says:

He began by stressing the need to preserve the primacy of the liberal spirit in education, in all branches of study and especially in the liberal arts, its native home. Without the preservation and encouragement of an able and devoted faculty, he declared, no university could flourish. But its inner life secured, the university must recognize and fulfill its many responsibilities to the society which it served and which maintained it.

Smith immediately hired quality scholars to bolster the academic standards at Manitoba. E. K. Brown in English and Robert McQueen in political economy were Smith's crown jewels, and Brown showed an interest in the general education reforms south of the border.<sup>32</sup>

Brown had received a *docteur ès lettres* of the Sorbonne, and had done a major thesis on Edith Wharton and a minor thesis on Matthew Arnold. Although Brown returned to Toronto and then moved to Winnipeg upon completion of his studies in Paris, he was also clearly attracted to Chicago. Laura Groening, Brown's biographer, notes the similarity between a public lecture Brown delivered and a paper Hutchins had published: "[Brown's] paper, titled 'The Higher Education: New Proposals,' was based on Robert Maynard Hutchins' 'The Higher Learning in America' and it was a forthright advocacy of what was becoming known as 'the Chicago Plan.'" The appeal of Hutchins' work and the Chicago School for Brown came not from an attraction to American values or American education but because of the Arnoldian strain in the Chicago Plan. Brown was also attracted to the more general New Humanist movement associated with Irving Babbitt and Norman Foerster and ended his talk on higher education with an endorsement of humanism: "Humanism is ready to admit the value of material comfort; it is not willing to regard the degree of comfort which exists in society as any index whatever to the degree of civilization of that society."<sup>33</sup> To pursue his Arnoldian, humanistic impulses, Brown would

go to the University of Chicago itself, where he ended his short career.

Brown did not participate in the Western Civilization project at the University of Manitoba (he left in 1937), but he and his successor, Roy Daniells, were influential in promoting Sidney Smith's vision of liberal education. Smith formed the Western Civilization Committee in 1941. Brown wrote Daniells in 1942 about a general education curriculum he thought would excite Smith, and Daniells ended up chairing the committee on Western Civilization.<sup>34</sup> The committee put forth its proposal in 1944. Smith described the Liberal Arts Experiment in the spring 1944 *Queen's Quarterly*, but Jasen described it more succinctly:

The plan which was eventually approved at Manitoba involved a reduction of free choice in the first two years and the addition of four new courses in "Western Civilization," dealing with the sciences, social sciences, literature and the visual arts. One of these would be included in each year of the arts program.<sup>35</sup>

The influence of Chicago's four-part division is evident in the Manitoba plan, and Smith, like Brown, was clearly attracted to the secular religion of Arnoldian thought. Smith continued to champion the "unity of knowledge" after he left Manitoba to assume the presidency of the University of Toronto. He ended a 1952 speech on the unity of knowledge by arguing for the central place of religion in human life:

The unity of knowledge that we strive to attain will be no real unity if we leave out the eternal realities. I am not injecting the notion of faith into this discussion. It is there already; it is part of the picture. Religion is a word that we are apt to fight shy of, but we cannot do without it. It is derived, some suggest, from *religare*—to bind again. Religion, with literature, religion, with art, religion, with philosophy, aided and abetted by the

sciences, can provide the cement wherewith to repair the walls of a badly shaken civilization.<sup>36</sup>

Despite, or possibly because of, these lofty goals for reviving the liberal arts and teaching a series of courses on Western Civilization, the Manitoba program was never offered. W. J. Waines, a member of the committee developing the Western Civilization program, says that he and other members "had little expectation that the courses would ever get off the ground because of the cost of providing competent tutors. The courses were listed in the calendar for a few years and then were quietly dropped." Twelve years after the defalcation scandal of 1932, financial and human resources were, not surprisingly, a huge stumbling block. N. R. Smith, who had been at Chicago in the early Hutchins years, wrote of similar problems in a letter to Roy Daniells, explaining that

The primary difficulties are cost, time-table, and distance. The sole definite information that we have on the first is that even Chicago, with all its resources, finds it a heavy burden. A similar programme on a more modest scale was considered in 1926-7 by a small committee of which I was a member. It was abandoned because of these three obstacles. Conditions are worse now than then.

His recommendation was that the plans not be put into effect until money and tutors became available.<sup>37</sup>

The most ambitious Canadian plan of the liberal education era, and the plan most clearly influenced by the Chicago Plan, did not get out of the committee stage. Waines suggests that Smith may very shrewdly have been playing both sides of the fence, appealing to educators' and the public's sense of tradition, while in fact serving the material and modern needs of the province: "In his inaugural address he made a strong plea for liberal education but in fact, during his regime, the

University established and developed several professional areas and starved the Arts Faculty. Public demand was, of course, appeased by this policy."<sup>38</sup> We can see at all three provincial universities a strong rhetoric of liberal education undercut by material conditions that did not allow for curricular experimentation and demanded a focus upon the sciences and professional education.

#### LIBERAL EDUCATION ON THE GREAT PLAINS

The answers to the questions I posed early in the paper should now be more apparent. Some schools, like the universities of Kansas and Nebraska, stayed within the realm of traditional liberal education, although they combined the oratorical and philosophical traditions more thoroughly than educators of early centuries. Canadian schools, and Manitoba in particular, seemed to strive for a similar realization of traditional liberal education values. But the interesting and innovative addition to our understanding of liberal education that the land-grant colleges and western Canadian universities provide is what I have been calling liberal-professional education. This combination, from the perspective of a traditionalist like President Hutchins, violates the limits of a liberal education. But invoking a liberal education in the name of the professions conferred upon these practical schools some of the status and legitimacy that only a liberal education tradition possessed. When we hear presidents of contemporary land-grant colleges claiming that liberal education is still at the core of education in America we can now see the nature and composition of that liberal education: principles behind practices.

The University of Chicago most clearly influenced the reforms at the state universities, while the General College at the University of Minnesota influenced or shared the same values with the land-grant colleges and the liberal-professional schools in Canada, particularly Alberta. The source of influence is

an important issue for understanding the development of postsecondary education in Canada. Those who support the view that liberal education in Canada has a continuous, unbroken tradition assume that the educational values of nineteenth-century Anglo-Canada were simply transplanted on the prairies. I am arguing that a sensitivity to the continental trends in education suggests a period when liberal education held limited sway anywhere (1900-1930), followed by a revival in the 1930s and 1940s, largely catalyzed by the liberal education experiments at Chicago, Wisconsin, and Minnesota.

While there is considerable evidence to suggest that Chicago and Minnesota were direct influences on the educational theories if not practices of other schools, the two important trends to notice are the blurred lines of historical influence and regional rather than national similarities. Although Canada and most of its regions have strong historical ties to the British Commonwealth, the American influence on Canadian education and culture has always been significant. The importation of traditional liberal education from the United States, however, is ironic: Canadian educators seemed to be strengthening their ties to the British Empire through relations with the republican nation to the south. A more appropriate metaphor than influence for understanding historical developments might be "articulation."<sup>39</sup> Schools in western Canada and throughout the Great Plains drew from various educational traditions and attempted to articulate—to voice, and to "yoke together"—a vision of education suitable to their environment.

The similarity of many of these articulations, and their differences from nineteenth-century, eastern views of education also suggests that regional identities are as or more significant than national identities. Looked at from an even larger perspective, continentalism rather than nationalism may provide a key for understanding trends and patterns not only in education but in other areas of study.<sup>40</sup>

## NOTES

1. Daniel Bell, *The Reforming of General Education: The Columbia College Experience in Its National Setting* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1966), p. 32.

2. Bell's *Reforming of General Education* (ibid.) identifies the Chicago plan, Columbia's Great Books course (1919), and Harvard's *General Education in a Free Society* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1945) as the three most prominent general education experiments in the United States during the twentieth century, but during the interwar period Chicago, Wisconsin, and Minnesota drew the most attention. See Laurence R. Veysey, "Stability and Experiment in the American Undergraduate Curriculum," in *Content and Context: Essays on College Education*, ed. Carl Kaysen (New York: McGraw Hill, 1973), pp. 1-64.

3. David R. Russell, *Writing in the Academic Disciplines, 1870-1990* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1991), pp. 135-235.

4. Bruce Kimball, *Orators and Philosophers: A History of the Idea of Liberal Education* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1986), pp. 13, 116.

5. See Frederick Rudolph's *The American College and University: A History* (New York: Knopf, 1962), pp. 130-35 for a lively discussion of the Yale Report.

6. A.B. McKillop, *A Disciplined Intelligence: Critical Inquiry and Canadian Thought in the Victorian Era* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1979), p. 12; Allan Smith, *Canada: An American Nation? Essays on Continentalism, Identity, and the Canadian Frame of Mind* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1994), pp. 325-28.

7. For the Canadian history, see McKillop, *Disciplined Intelligence* (ibid.) esp. pp. 23-58, 171-204; Henry Hubert, *Harmonious Perfection: English Studies in Nineteenth-Century Anglo-Canadian Colleges* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1994); Peter C. Emberley and Waller R. Newell, *Bankrupt Education: The Decline of Liberal Education in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), pp. 137-65. For the American history, see Douglas Sloan, *The Scottish Enlightenment and the American College Ideal* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1971); Laurence R. Veysey, *The Emergence of the American University* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965); pp. 182-251 and William H. Goetzmann, "Introduction," *The American Hegelians: An Intellectual Episode in the History of Western America*, ed. William H. Goetzmann (New York: Knopf, 1973), pp. i-xi.

8. For the Canadian history see McKillop, *Disciplined Intelligence* (note 6 above), esp. pp. 205-28; Emberley and Newell, *Bankrupt Education* (ibid.), pp. 14-29. For the American history, see Veysey, *Emergence* (note 7 above) pp. 180-251; James Berlin, *Rhetoric and Reality: Writing Instruction in American Colleges, 1900-1985* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1987) pp. 32-57; and Goetzmann, "Introduction" (ibid.).

9. Hubert, *Harmonious Perfection* (note 7 above), p. 178.

10. McKillop, *Disciplined Intelligence* (note 6 above), p. 229.

11. Veysey, *Emergence of the American University* (note 7 above), p. 109.

12. Quoted in Edward Danforth Eddy, Jr., *Colleges for Our Land and Time: The Land-Grant Idea in American Education* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1956), p. 33.

13. Frederick Rudolph describes the Wisconsin "Experimental College" as "out of this world" and says its influence on other schools was very limited. Frederick Rudolph, *Curriculum: A History of the American Undergraduate Course of Study Since 1636* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1977), p. 277.

14. Mortimer J. Adler, "Liberal Education—Theory and Practice," (1941), rpt. in *Reforming Education: The Opening of the American Mind*, ed. Geraldine Van Doren (New York: Macmillan, 1988), pp. 112-13; Milton Mayer, *Robert Maynard Hutchins: A Memoir*, John H. Hicks, ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), p. 99; Rudolph, *Curriculum* (ibid.), p. 278; Mortimer J. Adler, "Chicago School," (1945), rpt. in Van Doren, *Reforming Education* (above), pp. 32-33.

15. Rudolph, *Curriculum* (note 13 above), p. 277; Eddy, *Colleges for Our Land* (note 12 above), p. 156.

16. John B. Johnston, *The Liberal College in Changing Society* (New York: The Century Company, 1930), pp. ii, v; Rudolph, *Curriculum* (note 13 above), p. 279; Kimball, *Orators and Philosophers* (note 4 above), p. 180.

17. Gerald Graff, *Professing Literature: An Institutional History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), p. 164; Clifford Griffin, *The University of Kansas: A History* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1974), pp. 559, 568.

18. R. McLaran Sawyer, *Centennial History of the University of Nebraska*, vol. 2, *The Modern University, 1920-1969* (Lincoln: Centennial Press, 1973), pp. 69, 120-21.

19. Eddy, *Colleges for Our Land* (note 12 above), p. 212; J. Raymond Derby, "The Esthetic Awakening of Iowa," WOI radio address, 22 November 1938, English Department Personnel Files, Iowa State

University Archives, Ames; Earle Ross, *A History of the Iowa State College of Agriculture and Mechanic Arts* (Ames: Iowa State College Press, 1942), pp. 346, 368.

20. James C. Carey, *The Kansas State University: The Quest for Identity* (Lawrence: The Regents Press of Kansas, 1977), p. 179.

21. Rudolph, *Curriculum* (note 14 above), p. 260. According to Michael Hayden, the humanities at the University of Saskatchewan did not receive any significant funding until the 1950s when the new federal Canada Council provided support for the humanities and the social sciences. *Seeking a Balance: The University of Saskatchewan, 1907-1982* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1983), p. 202.

22. Emberley and Newell, *Bankrupt Education* (note 7 above), p. 4.

23. R. C. Wallace, *A Liberal Education in a Modern World* (Toronto: MacMillan, 1932), p. 53.

24. David R. Murray and Robert A. Murray, *The Prairie Builder: Walter Murray of Saskatchewan* (Edmonton: NeWest Press, 1984), pp. 21-24; Hayden, *University of Saskatchewan* (note 21 above), p. 208.

25. Patricia Jane Jasen, "The English Canadian Language Arts Curriculum: An Intellectual History, 1800-1950" (Ph.D. diss., University of Manitoba, 1987), pp. 290-92; see also Hayden, *University of Saskatchewan* (note 21 above), pp. 178-79.

26. Walter Hugh Johns, *A History of the University of Alberta, 1908-1969* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1981), p. 21.

27. R. C. Wallace, *A Liberal Education* (note 23 above), pp. 4, 54-61.

28. Ibid., p. 53.

29. E. K. Broadus to R. C. Wallace, 29 March 1932, Accession No. 3/2/4/3/1-6, University of Alberta Archives (UAA), Edmonton.

30. Ibid., see also, E. K. Broadus to R. C. Wallace, 19 January 1934, Accession No. 3/2/4/3/1-6, UAA.

31. W. L. Morton, *One University: A History of the University of Manitoba, 1877-1952* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1957), p. 159; Henry Stanley Ferns, *Reading from Left to Right: One Man's Political History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983), pp. 35-36; Philip Marchand, *Marshall McLuhan: The Medium and the Messenger* (Toronto: Random House, 1989), p. 15.

32. Ferns, ibid., p. 48; Morton, ibid., pp. 148-51, 153-54, 159-60, 160-61.

33. Laura Smyth Groening, E.K. Brown: *A Study in Conflict* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), pp. 51, 52.

34. E. K. Brown to Roy Daniells, 6 March 1942, Box 4, Folder 3, Roy Daniells Papers, University of British Columbia Archives (UBCA), Vancouver.

35. Sidney Earl Smith, "The Liberal Arts: An Experiment," *Queens Quarterly* 51 (1944): 1-12; Jasen, "Language Arts Curriculum" (note 25 above), p. 293.

36. Sidney Earl Smith, *Unity of Knowledge: The Sciences and the Humanities* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1952), p. 12.

37. W. J. Waines, "University of Manitoba Presidents I Have Known: Recollections and Impressions," n.d., Mss Sc 58, p. 7, University of Manitoba Archives, Winnipeg; N. R. Smith to Roy Daniells, 8 October 1943, Roy Daniells Papers, UBCA.

38. Waines, *ibid.*, p. 6.

39. Articulation theory is often associated with the Birmingham School and Stuart Hall. See *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, ed. David Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen (New York: Routledge, 1996).

40. Allan Smith's essays in *Canada: An American Nation?* are clear expressions of the continentalist perspective, that "Canada cannot be understood apart from its continental context." *Canada: An American Nation?* (note 6 above), p. 6.