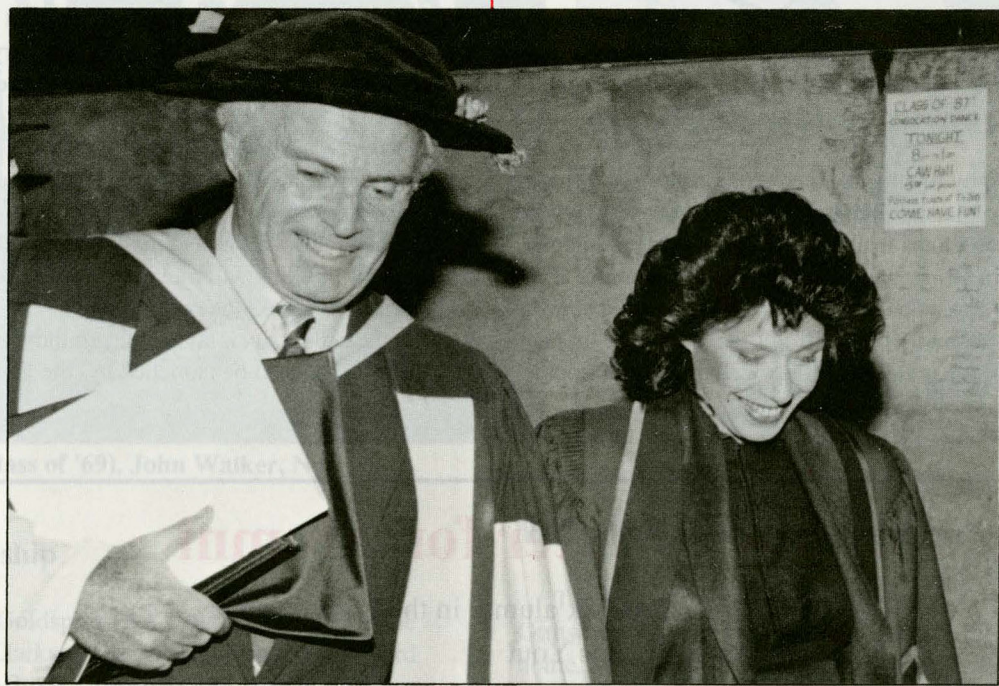


Looking Back after 20 Years

In 1968, Alan Earp joined Brock University as Provost. Six years later, he was named President. Brock had then 2,327 full-time students, 181 faculty, and an operating budget of \$9.2 million. Now at the end of his tenure as President, Brock has 4,956 full-time students, 302 faculty and a budget of \$42.8 million. Alan Earp reflects on the past and comments on the future in a conversation with Grant Dobson.



President Earp with honorary doctorate recipient Barbara Frum, host of CBC's *The Journal*.

What are your first recollections of Brock?

I have to confess that, as my experience was largely at the University of Toronto, I was skeptical about the establishment of some of the smaller, newer universities around 1963-64. However, it soon became clear that there was a role for institutions such as Brock. It made good sense to locate a university in this region.

Can you tell us about the university as you encountered it 20 years ago?

There was a job for the university to do and there was the excitement of getting on with it. There had to be a sorting out of what kind of university this was to be. A lot of faculty came from an "Oxbridge" tradition, as I did myself, and wanted to follow the route Trent had: a small residential college system.

But I think the die had already been cast, partly by the location, partly by the wide range of subjects in which we were already engaged. Those commitments made it inevitable that this should be very much a people's university.

What do you mean by that?

We were located in a region where the children of professionals went to their parents' alma mater. By and large our students were the first members of their families to attend university. In the early years, Brock was in a position to accept just about all who applied and in so doing was providing opportunity where there had been none.

What were the early expectations for growth at Brock?

The expectations were for pretty prodigious growth; 8,000 students by the 1980's, and a master plan calling for a monumental campus. By the early '70's it was clear that the early growth projections were overstated. So it was difficult adjusting from these greater expectations to the realities of the 1970's, and learning to live within our means.

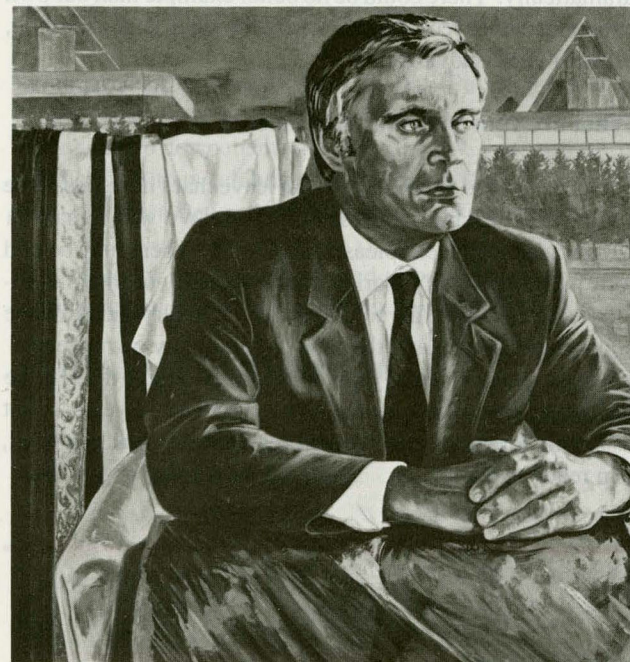
One thing that assisted that adjustment was part-time studies. There were those who were not so sure that universities should offer such programs. Professor Jo Meeker, then Director of Continuing Education, did an excellent job of providing a framework for part-time studies upon which we built. And that kept the wolf from the door as part-time enrolment increased while time full-time enrolment de-

"There were the days when some felt that this University was dispensable. No one suggests that now."

clined. There was a demand for part-time studies and we were well placed to meet that demand. That was an important step in Brock's development.

What is your view of the University's relationship to the community?

There has been a deliberate effort, perhaps before it became fashionable, to open our facilities to the communities we serve. The pool and athletics complex are only the most recent and perhaps most conspicuous examples. That is a characteristic of Brock that I am sure will continue.



Are you satisfied with the growth of Brock's academic reputation?

Yes. I don't think there is any question that at the outset, the most important thing to do was to raise our institutional credibility. That is certainly something which has improved tremendously, partly a function of time. However much can be attributed to the continuing efforts of dedicated faculty and staff. The best possible advertisement for a university is the positive experience of its students. And that has been good from the start at Brock.

Several have used the term "cheeky" to describe Brock's forthright approach and image. Is this an accurate assessment?

Certainly a characteristic of Brock is its reputation as the most direct and up front university in the province. We've always seen ourselves as accountable and proud to be. I suppose that while others lamented the rules imposed, we tried to make a go of it and did and acquired a reputation for good management.

At a time of lean resources, was it difficult to attract and retain the best faculty?

We have lost very few academics. That is one indication that faculty members have felt reasonably satisfied here. Part of this is that during our lean years we plowed what funds we had into the academic sector. I think we have shown the greatest percentage increase in faculty appointments in the province.

What are the factors that you feel have been most satisfactory for faculty and staff?

I think most people find Brock and Niagara an attractive environment in which to work. Our task has been to provide an environment in which people can flourish and I think they have. Innovation is encouraged from the bottom up. Our strengths come out of programs as they are developed by Brock people, not from some predetermined direction that is imposed.

How do you look back on the days when Brock fought for its existence?

While I never had any doubts, there were the days when some felt that this university was dispensable. No one suggests that now. It's interesting. In the early days, the government urged growth. Brock opened early under pressure and took its first 100 students. Then there was the period where those pressures subsided and one was almost made to feel guilty about existing. It was suggested that we were superfluous, that we were a drain on the established schools. And now here we are in 1988, being urged to grow and finding ourselves unable to do so. In a sense, we have come full circle.

Looking Back

As the demographics have changed, have students changed?

There is no question that current students are much more mark-oriented than many of their predecessors. Essentially I don't think they are all that different as people but certainly they are job-oriented, perhaps a little too much so. They may not give themselves quite as much scope as in those heady days of student unrest.

I think a degree of security is valued by these students. After all it's not that many years since a major recession when jobs were hard to get and people were worried. They come from families that knew the depression, whether here or in Europe, and this is ingrained in our psyche. I hope this confidence increases so that people, particularly during their student years, will broaden their interests beyond a single minded pursuit of something that will assure them of a job.

“I think we have avoided, partly because we are small, some of the excesses of larger universities.”

Do Brock students graduate with richer vision as well as a job ticket?

Definitely. I think we have avoided, partly because we are small, some of the excesses of the larger universities. We have never swung right away from general education. We do have more professional programs now but these are solidly-based upon opportunities for liberal learning.

Government says universities must prepare society for the technological, economic future. Is there consensus among your colleagues as to what this means?

I think we agree that a good undergraduate education is the right base for future challenges. You move on from there to professional and graduate schools. All of these disciplines, particularly those upon which our economic renewal depend are more sophisticated, more expensive. There is a knowledge explosion to be taken into account. It's hard to see less time being spent in education. While I don't see a need for us

to be rushing into more graduate work, I think that too will evolve. I'm quite sure that 40 years down the line Brock will be a full-service university. We have built an excellent base and when new professional schools are needed in the province, Brock has positioned itself as an appropriate candidate for consideration.

Are there other challenges on the horizon, either those you would have relished or otherwise?

I would have enjoyed participating in the near doubling of our residence capacity which may be imminent. Obviously, this will add a new dimension to campus life and this is particularly welcome when you recall the days when we could not fully occupy the residence we had.

Has the President's job changed over your tenure?

In recent years, the opportunities for involvement with students have become comparatively few and I have found that aspect dissappointing. The paper work, alas, has increased!

What are your thoughts as you leave this office to Dr. Terry White?

I feel very enthusiastic about Brock's prospects under Terry White's leadership. Certainly this is a good time for a change in this office and Terry brings broad experience and a new vigour. I think he will fit Brock very well. It may be a good time for some type of planning exercise and I think Dr. White may be receptive to the idea. I would only caution that the assumptions upon which one plans today can change dramatically. There could be no better example than our own experience over recent years where the rules kept changing, often to our disadvantage.

What are your plans for retirement?

I look forward to taking the first leave that I have had since I joined the teaching profession in '52. We will remain in Niagara and I am very pleased about that. There may be odd jobs in the university world either nationally or internationally which I might like to undertake. It's very nice to have some options open and the time to follow my own agenda.

Apart from my three years in the army, I have not left the university environment since 1941. I've had 16 years—first as Acting President and then as President at Brock. All in all, I'm ready to retire.
