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THE MAN IN THE IVORY TOWER:

F. CYRIL JAMES OF MCGILL.

Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1991.

314 pp. \$34.95.

On September 4, 1939, the day after the Second World War broke out, a young economics professor from the University of Pennsylvania arrived in Montreal. Cyril James had been invited to McGill University to revive its ailing School of Commerce, an appointment which he had accepted only after much soul-searching. James had visited Montreal earlier in the year and neither the city nor the University had left a favourable impression upon him. Never mind, his contract with McGill was but for two years, after which he would return to Philadelphia. But James did not return to the United States, owing to an extraordinary development. Two months after his arrival at McGill he was appointed its principal.

What prompted the Board of Governors to choose a thirty-six year old visiting professor to head the university? The explanation lies both in the circumstances of the day and in James' particular gifts. The country was at war and, what is more, the university needed a successor to the departing Lewis Douglas who was returning to his native United States. To Chancellor Beatty and the board James was made of the right stuff. For one thing, he had demonstrated leadership during his brief time at McGill; for another, his academic credentials were impeccable and his politics safe. An expert on banking reform and an advocate of enlightened capitalism (he had opposed Roosevelt's New Deal legislation), James spoke the language of the business-oriented members of the Board of Governors.

Cyril James' family background and school record gave little hint of a career in higher education. Born in London, England, of working-class parents, he seemed destined to an occupation befitting his social station. Indeed, his school record smacked of mediocrity as he failed his eleven-plus examination and later the entrance examination to the University of London. Young James seems to have been what the English call a "late bloomer," someone who wakes up intellectually at a later school age. Perhaps the change of scenery provided the spark. In 1923 his academic career began to blossom, not in London but in Philadelphia, where with the assistance of a travel scholarship he enrolled at the University of Pennsylvania. Three years later he had his doctorate in economics and a regular teaching position at the university. In 1935 the thirty-one year old James was promoted to full professor in the university's Wharton School of Business, backed by an impressive list of publications on banking theory and a growing national reputation.

James' principalship at McGill spanned twenty-two years during which he steered the university through the lean years of the Second World War and

the expansionist years of the post-war period. Subscribing to an autocratic style of leadership, he ran the university with a firm hand. Today's institution, in which power is dispersed among overlapping committees composed of professors, administrators, and students, would have been alien to him. And while James did not deny that the Board of Governors was the final arbiter in all matters affecting the university, he steadfastly maintained that the principal's office was the sole source for the formulation and initiation of policy.

James' notion of leadership was not seriously challenged during his tenure. The professoriate at McGill, until the 1960s, was not an organized force, being more a collection of individuals; as for the deans of faculties, they were so preoccupied with defending the interests of their own academic fiefs as to have little time for the larger university. Thus many of the initiatives for new programs and directions in the university originated at the top, which means that James was frequently in advance of the faculty in calling for changes in the university.

Cyril James' skill and reputation as a university prexy carried him in other leadership directions. During the war he headed the Committee on Reconstruction, a blue-ribbon committee mandated to advise the federal government on post-war social and welfare policy. Then in the 1950s he played a central role in convincing the federal government to fund Canada's financially-starved universities, though ironically McGill and other Quebec universities did not initially share in the windfall owing to Premier Duplessis' insistence that education was an exclusive province responsibility. James was also active in the international arena, in promoting co-operation among the world's universities. In 1960 he was elected president of the International Association of Universities.

As an educator of international stature, James travelled widely and, fortunately for us, frequently recorded his impressions. Indeed, a good portion of the book is given over to his travel notes. James shows himself a keen observer of different peoples and cultures. The quality of his comments is such as to suggest that in another life he might have been a Peter Kalm or Lord Durham.

Stanley Frost is eminently qualified to tell the story of one of McGill's greatest principals. He is himself a former McGill teacher and administrator and the author of a recent two-volume history of the university. Moreover, Frost had exclusive access to James' private papers and writings, which allowed him to unravel some of the mysteries surrounding an enigmatic personality. What emerges is a study of a dual personality. The public James comes across as poised, confident, eloquent in speech and persuasive in argument; the private James is seen as insecure, uncertain of his abilities and

awkward in his personal relationships. The public personality won out. James was the classic workaholic, devoting most of his energies to his job, leaving little time and emotion for those close to him, including his wife Irene who spent prolonged periods in England and the United States. Frost attributes their sputtering marriage to a "severe incompatibility of temperament and situation," suggesting that only the social conventions of the day preserved their fragile marriage.

If there is a fault in Frost's character assessment of James, it is the lack of corroborating evidence. The problem is that the author depends almost entirely on James' own writings and words in constructing his personality profile. For the most part, it is James on James, which raises questions about the objectivity of the description. Largely missing are the contributions of others who knew James intimately and who could have provided insights into his character and behaviour.

Cyril James' principalship at McGill ended in much the same way as it had begun – in sudden and dramatic fashion. Although James resigned his position in 1962, it was a forced resignation. In a behind-the-scenes power play managed by Chancellor R.P. Power, James was, in Frost's words, "summarily dismissed." The chancellor believed that the principal was "neglecting the university" and therefore had to go. Thus the James era at McGill concluded on a sour note. He deserved better.

The Man in the Ivory Tower is a fine book, thanks to strong writing, a brisk pace and, not least, the author's good sense in choosing an engaging subject. Stanley Frost has succeeded in producing a work that should appeal to the general reader as well as to the academic. No easy accomplishment that.

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"IT'S UP TO YOU":

WOMEN AT UBC IN THE EARLY YEARS.

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xii, 176 pp. \$29.95, cloth; \$19.95, paper.

"It's Up to You." *Women at UBC in the Early Years* is an example of the new social history of education, which emphasizes the social context of formal instruction and shows a keen interest in the relationship of the school to social equality and individual liberty.¹ Stewart explores several issues rarely raised by earlier generations of educational historians which Patricia Albjerg Graham has identified as fruitful areas for exploration in historical research on women in higher education: the degree to which a