Training Rural Ontario: OAC on the Guelph Campus

The Ontario Agricultural College (OAC) opened in 1874 on its 550-acre farm site. Over the next three decades, the college expanded as it fulfilled a double role for the provincial government, offering vocational training for young men and conducting experimental research for the Department of Agriculture.

Early Research Highlights

Student Life — Creating Intelligent Agriculturalists

The Principal and the President

Dr. James Mills — President 1879 to 1904

Farmers' Institute founder James Mills oversaw the school's expansion program and its incorporation with the Experimental Union in 1876. His vision was to create a research institution that would serve the needs of Ontario farmers.

William Johnston — Principal 1876 to 1879

William Johnston was a visionary leader who advocated affiliation of the Ontario School of Agriculture with the University of Toronto to gain access to research facilities and to offer a more comprehensive educational program.

Guided by its early affiliation with the Department of Agriculture, OAC conducted research that was practical and responsive to the needs of Ontario farmers. This public service approach dominated the OAC agenda for its first 90 years.

Henry “Holstein” — Professor of Dairying

Professor of dairying Henry “Holstein” Dean created travelling dairies to improve the quality of butter produced by Ontario farmers. Both its dairy short courses and extension programs established OAC as a leader in the dairy industry.

The Ontario Agricultural and Experimental Union

Students launched the Ontario Agricultural and Experimental Union in 1876 by asking farmers to provide testing sites for experimental programs. By 1924, more than 100,000 farmers were receiving seed packets as part of the largest experimental union in the world.

Student Life — Creating Intelligent Agriculturalists

“The dairy cow is the foster mother of the human race.”

The times are changing and we must keep pace... the watchword of agricultural progress in Ontario today should be educate! educate! experiment! experiment!”

In the 1880s, OAC began its first major building program. Construction included an expanded student residence/administration building, a cheese factory, a laboratory, barns, a livestock show building and an animal husbandry building.

Building the Campus

The Old Residence

Built in 1880, the Old Residence was the college's main building until 1929. It incorporated the original Moreton Lodge farmhouse and its entrance portico.

The Portico—An Enduring Symbol

Today, the portico still stands on Johnston Green as a symbol of the University's agricultural origins.

Organized Sports at OAC

Competing against teams from the University of Toronto and other schools, OAC won the Western Football Association intermediate championship in 1896 and 1897. Other sports included ice hockey, rugby, cricket, and track and field.

In 1888, the first graduates to receive the Bachelor of Science in Agriculture degree were, from left: J.A. Craig, J.J. Fee, G.C. Creelman, B.E. Paterson, and C. A. Zavitz.

Classroom work in the livestock department

C.A. Zavitz and the Soybean Industry

When Prof. Charles Zavitz began investigating soybeans, they were only a novelty crop. As a result of his work, new soybean varieties were developed, and soybeans eventually claimed the largest acreage of any crop in Ontario.

Student Life — Creating Intelligent Agriculturalists

We worked a full ten hours a day in the snow...
Macdonald Institute Joins OAC

In 1903, the Macdonald Institute (MAC) joined OAC on the Guelph campus. The school was dedicated to the education of rural women in domestic science and also offered teacher-training courses.

Mary Urie Watson served as director of Macdonald Institute from 1904 to 1920. She was dedicated to making domestic science a "profession" and promoted the institute's work by fostering close links with the Women's Institutes, a rural women's forum.

George Creelman, OAC President 1904 to 1920

Bringing OAC to the Farmers

Mac's First Director

Mac's Teaching Facility

Research Highlights

Horticulture

Poultry

Initiation — A Rite of Passage

Studying at Mac

William R. Graham was head of poultry at OAC and laid the foundation for the modern poultry industry by developing a "cafeteria-style" feeding approach.

Isabella Preston, an internationally acclaimed horticulturalist, entered OAC as a student in 1912. She became famous for the historic hybrid lily cross called the "George C. Creelman." The Creelman lily is pictured in a campus experimental plot.

Early OAC graduates were often hired as provincial "ag reps" to organize farmer groups and offer demonstrations and courses.

Although male and female students on campus were segregated most of the time, Mac girls took the lead in organizing co-ed dances, outdoor activities, carnivals, and club meetings.

Macdonald Consolidated School was built next door to Macdonald Institute in 1904 to give students opportunities for practice teaching. The Macdonald Stewart Art Centre now occupies the building.

Elementary students were transported to and from the consolidated school by wagon.

Initiations for "frosh" were held at both Mac and OAC. For male students, these events were often rough, highly physical affairs designed to build school spirit among the "aggies."
The Campus Serves in World War I

1914-1918

Artistic activities and service dominated life on the Guelph campus during the First World War. The Canadian Officer Training Corps (OAC Unit) was formed in 1915, with the first class completing training in Petawawa, Ontario. The OAC unit left for action in France after training.

Macdonald Institute graduates served as nurses and dieticians in military hospitals at home and overseas. A Voice for Peace at OAC

"I cannot conscientiously assist in promoting the organization of militia companies at the agricultural college."

When war broke out, Prof. Charles Zavitz was appointed acting president for an absent George Creelman. As a Quaker, Zavitz opposed military training on campus. Although many called for his resignation, it was refused by the provincial government, perhaps partly because as the Farmer's Advocate stated: "There is no better field husbandman...than Prof. Zavitz..."

War Memorial Hall was built in 1924 to honour OAC members who lost their lives in the First World War. OAC students chose the location by secretly cutting down a stand of trees and digging the building's foundation overnight.

In the Memorial Chapel, two bronze tablets bear the names of those who lost their lives in the First and Second World Wars.

Remembering Those Who Served

Wartime Advisors for Canada

During the First World War, Prof. Mary Urie Watson and OAC president George Creelman served as advisors on food economy and agriculture for the federal and provincial governments.

Serving at Home

This motley group of characters took part in a First World War period initiation on campus.

In 1914, Prof. Charles Zavitz, 1914-1918

Mac students and OAC faculty wives formed groups to assist in relief work. They prepared packages for overseas relief, established a Red Cross branch and held fundraisers for wartime causes.

Dinner menu, 1915

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The Expanding College Community

After the First World War, the campus expanded with student enrolment increases and the addition of the Ontario Veterinary College, which relocated from Toronto. Although OVC, OAC and Macdonald Institute remained dedicated to vocational training, research and coursework were influenced by a new scientific focus and pedagogical modernization.

"A tremendous impetus has been given in the last few years to the spirit of research...Agriculture has shared...in this recent development. Colleges and experimental stations have been revivified by the new spirit."

In 1922 OVC became the third college to join the Guelph campus. The veterinary college had been operating in Toronto since 1862, but the move to Guelph offered collaborative research and teaching possibilities with OAC.

As Principal of OVC from 1918 to 1945, Charles McGilvray envisioned a changing role for future veterinarians—from equine specialists to public health scientists focused upon human-animal links.

Although the three Guelph colleges remained dedicated to the practical improvement of Ontario's farming community, a new national focus and a spirit of internationalism became apparent in their work.

As early as 1910, Guelph's reputation as a centre for agricultural science began to attract students from around the world.

The Growth of an International Outlook

Pushing the Research Envelope

The Ontario Veterinary College Joins the Guelph Campus 1922

Francis Schofield's work on cattle hemorrhaging began at OVC in 1921. His research led to discovery of the anticoagulant... After his retirement, Schofield returned to his adopted home, Korea, where he devoted himself to humanitarian works.

Some outstanding projects with national implications began to emerge at OAC, including Prof. O.M. McConkey's work on field crop genetics. His trials with cereal varieties pioneered grassland improvements across the country.

In keeping with their mandates, the three colleges continued to devote much of their resources to providing education and advisory services to Ontario's farmers.

Olive Cruikshank's vision for domestic science included "...a study of the relations of the members of the family to each... During her term as director of Macdonald Institute from 1920 to 1941, a new "mothercraft" child-care program was added.

Public Service Founded on Scientific Research

Rural Education

Redefining Domestic Science

Farmers' Week, Macdonald College, 1938.
In the 1920s and 1930s, Guelph's student population rose and fell along with changes in rural population and the popularity of technical education. In 1914, the Macdonald Institute moved into a new, purpose-built college building. This created a new campus community for students, a chance to experience controlled and social freedom.

The Drive by Tom Thomson was purchased by OAC in 1925 with money from a "picture fund" started by English professor Orlando J. Stevenson who taught at Guelph from 1916 to 1939.

University of Guelph collection at the Macdonald Stewart Art Centre

In the 1920s, weaving a daisy chain became a Mac graduation tradition.

Residence life created strong bonds and encouraged student activism. The OAC Students' Co-operative Association formed in 1914 to reduce the cost of textbooks still operates today, providing student housing and a campus bookstore.

Getting Together

In 1925, OAC established a visual art collection that became the foundation of the University of Guelph and Macdonald Stewart Art Centre collections.

Social and sporting events provided opportunities for students of both sexes to get together. Conversazione, was a dance held each February that became the social event of the year.

Except for social events, Macdonald Institute remained a self-contained world. Mac students continued to be largely segregated from male students on campus.

The year 1925 marked the beginning of College Royal, Guelph's annual open house event. By the 1970s, College Royal was bringing 20,000 to 30,000 visitors to campus each March. It is still the largest student-run event at a Canadian university.

College Royal

We are! We are! We are the O.A.C.
We farm! We farm! Experimentally,
We judge! The bull! We feed the pig
B'gosh, We don't give a darn for any darn man,
That don't give a darn for us.

I1914-1939

A Home for the Arts

University of Guelph collection at the Macdonald Stewart Art Centre

Campus Life Between the Wars

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The Guelph Daily Mercury, Aug. 9, 1941

The Canadian Officer Training Corps OAC Unit, which was originally formed during the First World War, graduated fourth-year students with second lieutenant certificates.

RCAF Wireless School No. 4 parades in front of Johnston Hall, ca. 1942.

RCAF Cookery School course program plan, 1940

An Air Force officer in the mess hall, ca. 1940

During Second World War more than 100 students, faculty and alumni from OAC, OVC and MAC enlisted in the Armed Forces. Much of the campus was occupied and fenced off for use by the Royal Canadian Airforce Wireless School and Cookery School.

The Colleges in World War II
Moving Toward University Status

A New Emphasis on Scientific Research

The campus experienced a loosening of political control during the post-war period. For the first time in OAC history, the president was appointed by a committee of alumni rather than the minister of agriculture. John D. MacLachlan served as president from 1950 to 1962.

Although the campus was bursting at the seams by the late 1950s, building expansion was slow. Major changes had to wait until university status was achieved.

Rapid post-war increases in population and technology significantly affected Guelph's research programs. A new focus on the global economy and changing demographics at home led to an emphasis on both basic and applied science.

The interrelationship of human and animal health became an increasingly important area of study. In this photo, students test a heart monitor on a sheep.

At OAC, research breakthroughs in soils, field crops and livestock genetics contributed to the college's growing reputation as a leader in scientific research. In 1953, "Frosty" was OAC's first calf born from frozen semen.

The changing role of women as consumers led to a doubling of Mac's home economic students between 1940 and 1960.

OAC's extension education department, which was created in 1959, began to address the needs of a declining rural population. It shifted focus to include rural sociology and adult education, in addition to scientific agricultural production.

A shift toward small-animal practice at OVC represented a new specialization at the veterinary college.

The post-war period was a time of expansion in facilities, student enrolment, scientific research and internationalism. The Guelph colleges remained under the jurisdiction of the Ontario Department of Agriculture, but the need to pursue teaching and research at a more advanced level was becoming evident.
In the 1950s, Guelph students, alumni, and faculty agitated to unite the colleges as a university and remove them from political control. With the merger of OAC, OVC and Macdonald Institute as the Federated Colleges in 1962, that goal moved closer.

The Federated Colleges

Guelph's alumni played a major role in moving Guelph toward university status. John Kenneth Galbraith, OAC's most famous alumnus, railed against the lack of academic freedom where a scientist had to consider "the effect of his work on the political fortunes of a superior."

OAC president John D. MacLachlan became president of the Federated Colleges. He saw federation "as a necessary step before we got the university."

This painting by A.Y. Jackson was presented during the celebration of its 50th anniversary Alumni Day on 1959.

The Federated Colleges combined their administration and budgets, but they remained under the direction of the Department of Agriculture and affiliated with the University of Toronto for degree-granting purposes.

"I do think it would be wise for you to explore now the possibility of combining the Ontario Agricultural College, Ontario Veterinary College, and Macdonald Institute in one institution with degree-granting powers."

Sydney Smith, president of the University of Toronto, 1957

The Agricultural Research Institute of Ontario was established at the same time as the Federated Colleges. The government foresaw the need for a new agency to oversee agricultural research and education in Ontario—such as the programs offered at the Kemptville Agricultural School.

1962-1964

1962-1964

1962-1964

1962-1964
College Life on the Hill

1945-1962

Mac Triumphs

After 11 years of lobbying, Macdonald Institute finally obtained a four-year degree program in household science in 1947. This was a major step forward for Mac, which focused its new academic program on professional training.

In the post-war period, the University of Guelph attracted large numbers of students from overseas. From left: Prof. J.W. Reid, Wim Wierbaak from Holland, Conny Campbell from Jamaica and Shaker Amer from Egypt observe a Geiger counter demonstration in 1961.

Frustrated with a lack of meeting space to call their own, Guelph students dug out the basement of the Massey Library to create a coffee shop in 1951. The Ontarion celebrated this in its first issue.

Although sports remained segregated by gender, the campus became famous for its student participation in athletics.

The Ontarion

The stained glass windows in Guelph’s Paisley Memorial United Church represent Gordon Couling’s best work.

When Gordon Couling was hired as Mac’s arts lecturer in 1949, he brought a new appreciation of the arts to campus. Couling eventually became chair of the University’s fine art department in 1965.

1945-1962

Students on Campus

Athletics

1945-1962

Student Activism

Homecoming

1945-1962
The University strives for excellence in those areas and disciplines which can be enriched by the traditions of the past and by opportunities of the future.

President John D. MacLachlan, University of Guelph publicity brochure, 1966
The University of Guelph Act of 1964 established an independent university with its own board of governors and senate, enabling it to make decisions and plan its own programs. This marked a major building program, required to accommodate 15,000 students by the 1980s. Residences, academic buildings, a library and a stadium were designed and built.

The first Board of Governors, ca. 1964, was charged with overseeing University administration. The University Senate is responsible for educational policy. Guelph students have been members since 1968.

In 1966, work began on South Residences—one of the largest residence systems in North America at the time. Reviewing a model of South Residences is University of Guelph chair Thomas McEwan, Ontario Minister of Housing Stanley Randall and Guelph president John D. MacLachlan.

The University Centre, completed in 1974, was designed as a combined student centre and administration building.

The University of Guelph Act of 1964 established an independent university with its own board of governors and senate—resulting in big changes on campus. These included a major building program, transfer of the University's jurisdiction to the Department of Education and switching 1,200 employees from the civil service to the University payroll.

“We are, in the province, engaged in an unprecedented and massive program of university expansion. This bill to create the University of Guelph marks another substantial step forward.”

Ontario Premier John P. Robarts, 1964

President John D. MacLachlan, 1965

Murdo MacKinnon, former dean of arts, 1988

“...Get your buildings up, hire your faculty and staff, let the world know you are accepting students, get moving as fast as you can.”

Ontario Premier John P. Robarts, 1964

Building Expansion
1964-1995

In 1964, the directions were: ‘Get your buildings up, hire your faculty and staff, let the world know you are accepting students, get moving as fast as you can.’”

1964-1995

Building a University
The creation of the University of Guelph demanded a radical reorganization of the campus. Existing colleges and departments were restructured, and new ones were established, leading to the establishment of an international research program and new curricular approaches.

“A principal demand on the University will be to educate for change. The ability of our graduates to cope successfully will be the best measure of our success as educators.”

1964-1999

Four New Colleges

- The College of Arts
- The College of Social Science
- The College of Biological Science

The Arts: A Community Effort

The College of Arts

- Drama, English, Fine Art, History, Languages and Literatures, Philosophy

The College of Biological Science

- Botany (genetics and molecular biology), Physical Education (human biology and human kinetics), Microbiology, Nutrition, Zoology

The College of Physical Science

- Chemistry and Biochemistry, Computing and Information Science, Mathematics and Statistics, Physics

The College of Social Science

- Economics, Geography, Political Studies, Psychology, Sociology and Anthropology

1964-1999

- Guelph's tradition of active student involvement helped create a university that became increasingly learner-centred and community-focused in the 1970s and 1980s. In 1973, the Central Student Association was established and recognized by the Board of Governors.

- CFU Radio was created on-campus in 1970 as the voice of students. Craig Benjamin was spoken word co-ordinator from 1990 to 1993.

- The gryphon mascot, adopted in 1967, is a mythical creature from Asiatic lore that draws the chariot of the sun across the sky.

- The 5,100 was completed for the 1970 football season.

- The Lucy Maud Montgomery papers were acquired in 1980 by the University of Guelph Library archives.

Changing Communities: The Macdonald Institute Transforms Itself

- In 1968, Macdonald Institute became the first residential college at the University of Guelph. It was renamed Macdonald Stewart Art Centre in 1983.

- The College of Family and Consumer Studies led the way in the University’s first large-scale international project in the 1970s, helping the University of Ghana develop its Department of Home Science.

- Margaret McCready, centre, in Ghana, ca. 1970.

Toward 2000: Challenges and Responses

- In 1998, FACS amalgamated with the College of Social Science to form the College of Social and Applied Human Sciences, which later played an integral role in the 2006 establishment of the College of Management and Economics.

- Over the years, Inuit theatrical performances on campus complemented the extensive Inuit art collection built by the Macdonald Stewart Art Centre.

- Chemistry and Biochemistry, Computing and Information Science, Mathematics and Statistics, Physics

- Economics, Geography, Political Studies, Psychology, Sociology and Anthropology

- Botany (genetics and molecular biology), Physical Education (human biology and human kinetics), Microbiology, Nutrition, Zoology

- Drama, English, Fine Art, History, Languages and Literatures, Philosophy

- Canadian society is continually changing, and so is the University of Guelph. In 1968, Macdonald Institute became the first residential college at the University of Guelph. It was renamed Macdonald Stewart Art Centre in 1983.

- The College of Family and Consumer Studies led the way in the University’s first large-scale international project in the 1970s, helping the University of Ghana develop its Department of Home Science.

- Margaret McCready, centre, in Ghana, ca. 1970.

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The University of Guelph
Changing Lives, Improving Life

Learning

Guelph values teaching that is current and relevant, recognizing that students need to be equipped with skills that will serve them well in the future. Teaching and learning are central to the University’s mission, and the University has made significant investments in learning and teaching resources to enhance the learning experience. Guelph has been designated as a Centre of Teaching Excellence by the Ontario Association of Universities (OAU) and has received numerous awards for teaching excellence. The University has also been recognized for its innovative approaches to learning and teaching, including the use of technology and the development of new courses and programs. Guelph is committed to providing a world-class education that prepares students for success in their future careers and personal lives.

Research

Guelph is a world-class research institution, with a strong focus on applied research and innovation. The University has a long history of producing high-quality research and has received numerous awards for its contributions to science and technology. Guelph researchers have made significant contributions to a wide range of fields, including agriculture, food science, veterinary medicine, and environmental science. The University is committed to fostering a culture of innovation and entrepreneurship, and it has established a number of research centres and institutes to support this mission. Guelph is dedicated to the discovery, sharing and application of knowledge in service to society.

Internationalism

Guelph is committed to preparing students for success in a globalized world, and it has a strong focus on international education and partnerships. The University has a long history of international collaborations and has established partnerships with universities and organizations around the world. Guelph students and faculty have the opportunity to study and work abroad, and the University offers a range of programs and initiatives to support international experiences. Guelph is dedicated to promoting cultural understanding and respect, and it is committed to fostering a diverse and inclusive community.

Collaboration

Guelph is committed to collaboration and partnerships, both within and beyond the University. The University has established partnerships with a wide range of organizations, including businesses, government agencies, and community organizations. These partnerships are designed to support research and innovation, as well as to address social and environmental challenges. Guelph is committed to fostering a culture of collaboration and to working with partners to achieve mutual benefits.

Open Learning

Guelph is committed to offering flexible and accessible education for all learners. The University has a long history of offering distance education programs and has established partnerships with organizations to deliver education to learners in remote and rural areas. Guelph is committed to using technology to support learning and to creating a range of opportunities for learners to engage with the University.

The University of Guelph is recognized as Canada’s premier agri-food centre, due in part to its partnership with the Canadian Food Inspection Agency and the Canadian Food Inspection Agency’s Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS-Canada). Guelph researchers are advancing the frontier of knowledge, including 30 faculty who hold prestigious Canada research chairs. Guelph researchers are working on projects that address critical local, national and global concerns, including the treatment of cystic fibrosis and cancer. Guelph is committed to providing a world-class education that prepares students for success in their future careers and personal lives.
In 1964, projected enrolment for the new University of Guelph forecast 15,000 students by the 1980s — an annual increase of about 1,000 per year. A long-range development plan completed in 1965 led to a massive building program throughout the 1970s and 1980s. The MacKinnon Building, named after the first Dean of Arts, Murdo MacKinnon (1964-1970), opened in 1967.
The Macdonald Institute was founded in 1903 during an era of public health reform. The domestic science movement took up the challenge to respond to high rates of disease, malnutrition, and infant and maternal mortality. It gave women the opportunity to become educated and show leadership.

Macdonald Institute was intended to train rural women in domestic science, good nutrition and hygiene in the hope that they would ultimately become farmers’ wives and teachers who would help upgrade the quality of rural life. It was established through the collaborative effort of Adelaide Hunter Hoodless, James Mills and James Robertson.

While serving as president as OAC (1879-1904), James Mills had a vision for OAC that included programs for rural female students. He actively supported Adelaide Hunter Hoodless in her efforts to move the school she had originally established in Hamilton to the Guelph campus.

Sir William Macdonald, a wealthy tobacco industrialist, believed that education needed to be reformed for a new industrial age and to instill pride in rural Canada. He gave a gift of $182,500 to establish the Macdonald Institute.

While president of the Hamilton Normal School of Domestic Science and Art, Adelaide Hunter Hoodless published an early textbook advocating the addition of domestic science to the school curriculum.

Adelaide Hunter Hoodless was a major figure in the early Canadian domestic science movement. She believed that scientific education was as important for farmers’ wives as it was for their husbands.
Guelph’s oldest college, the Ontario Veterinary College (OVC), was founded in 1862. Nineteenth-century wartime and agricultural activities created a demand for horses and meat supplies—and qualified veterinarians. Poor veterinary care led the Provincial Agricultural Association to lament the destruction of “many thousand pounds’ worth” of livestock through the “pretended skill of those whose aide is sought to alleviate the sufferings of domestic animals.”

In 1862, Adam Smith, a graduate of the Edinburgh Veterinary College, was named principal in an 1862 private charter to establish the Upper Canada Veterinary School in Toronto.

This veterinary fleam, right, was used to cut veins in bloodletting—and ancient practice based on the principle of correcting the imbalance of bodily humors. The mallet helped apply pressure to the fleam blade.

C.A.V. Barker Museum of Canadian Veterinary History, University of Guelph