

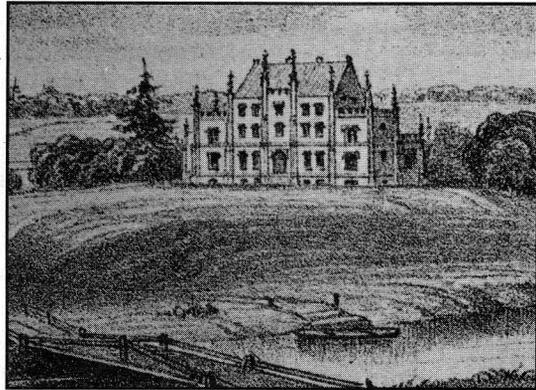
The Birth of Bishop's University

*"There is a tide in the affairs of men,
Which, taken at the flood,
leads on to fortune."*

Such a tide in the affairs of Bishop's University was taking place 150 years ago. For it was on 19 October 1843 that the still fledgling "Legislative Assembly of United Canada" meeting in Kingston was presented with a report on a petition from the Lord Bishop of Montreal to incorporate the "Diocesan College of Canada East." Discussion immediately ensued on the name and the risk of giving "the power of conferring degrees to a poor institution of the kind whose durability was quite uncertain."

Fortunately, the champion of the bill was the member for Sherbrooke, Edward Hale, a man of patience and consummate political skill, who had wisely recruited to his cause Robert Baldwin who, along with Louis H. LaFontaine, dominated the Canadian political scene during that crucial decade. Hale indicated that he had "already changed the name five times, to meet the wishes of different parties." For his part, Baldwin was to support the bill despite the fact that he was currently championing for Canada West a "Universities Bill" which would centralize all higher education in Toronto on a non-sectarian basis (including the move of Queen's, a university which had a Royal Charter and had just admitted its first students a year before).

Only eight days later, the bill returned for second reading, now referring to a "Diocesan College of the Protestant Episcopal Diocese of Quebec." Hale fought off further spirited opposition and, within a month, had it back for third and final reading on Monday, 20 November, still with its unwieldy moniker



Bishop's College, Lennoxville, 1846

This lithograph is the earliest known picture of Bishop's first building, which was designed by architect John George Howard in the Gothic Revival style.

intact. Fortunately, literally overnight a final amendment was proposed, and the next day the bill was sent forward to the Legislative Council referring to "Bishop's College." And just in time it was, as within the week both Baldwin and LaFontaine had resigned over the issue of responsible government, precipitating a full scale political crisis. By 9 December, Governor General Metcalfe met the Legislative Assembly to announce its dissolution and to give Royal Assent to a number of bills, including that concerning Bishop's College. The legislature did not meet again for a year, and then with a very different composition. By 1845 severe economic recession was setting in the colony, the potato blight spread famine to Ireland, presenting an unprecedented immigration challenge to Canada. The Universities Bill for Canada West never did pass.

So were it not for Hale, Bishop's might never have been. He was a member of the original trustees of the College, and our fourth Chancellor from 1865–75.