Preface
The Plaunt Lectures in the Intellectual Life of Carleton University

In 1956 Claude Bissell, then president of Carleton University, entered into negotiations with the Plaunt family, who wished to establish a lecture series in memory of Alan B. Plaunt, a pioneer of Canadian broadcasting. Plaunt’s widow and his daughter, Frances, felt that it was appropriate the lectures be given at Carleton, situated in the Ottawa Valley where Plaunt was born and grew up.

The first lecture was delivered in 1958, and the series continued until 1992. The presentations, scheduled for the spring and signalling the end of the academic year, were a major intellectual and social event at Carleton for many years. Prepared under the aegis of the president’s office, and later that of the dean of the faculty of arts, they were preceded by a dinner in honour of the current speaker, and a reception was always given at their conclusion. For a long time, guest speakers were asked to give two lectures on two consecutive days, but as other events increasingly came to compete with public lectures in the evenings, the presentations were shortened to a single lecture.

In his introduction both to the series and to Professor Jacob Viner’s inaugural lecture, the Honourable Brooke Claxton (then a member of the Board of Governors of the university) noted that Alan Plaunt’s life was cut short by illness in September 1941, when he was thirty-seven. Claxton stated that Plaunt, “for all his adult years … devoted a large part of his talents, his energy, and his private means to his concept of what Canada was and his vision of what it might become. More than almost anyone else he had to do with the birth of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation and the formation of its character as a great source of information and entertainment serving the Canadian people in the cause of
national unity and understanding.” The lectures were designed to celebrate Plaunt’s interests and achievements, and their publication will continue in the same spirit, for the themes chosen by the lecturers have proven to be both important and persistent in public discourse in Canada. They are also themes that represent significant areas of research at Carleton, an institution with an outlook and opportunities specific to its location in the nation’s capital.

Each lecture has been rendered as a paper in its own right. To this end, asides tangential to a lecture’s topic but delivered during the course of the lecture have been eliminated.

Many individuals at Carleton University assisted me in the initial preparation of the manuscripts. In particular, Dr Stuart Adam, vice president Academic and provost of Carleton University, provided financial support for this stage of the project; Dr Roger Blockley, dean of Graduate Studies and Research, furnished invaluable advice throughout the process; Patti Harper, the Carleton archivist, and her staff were patient and helpful in locating the manuscripts – dispersed through many files; and Ross Mutton and his staff found the audio and video tapes needed to complete the collection. To all of these colleagues, I would like to express my gratitude for their support and encouragement.

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