

Obituary: Malcolm C. Urquhart (1913–2002)

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Malcolm (Mac) Urquhart was born on December 12, 1913 in a small town in Alberta. His father originally had immigrated from Scotland and had established a farm in the region at the turn of the century. Mac began his education in one-room schoolhouse, completing nine years before moving to Edmonton to finish grades 10 and 11, just one year short of receiving a high school certificate. The onset of the Great Depression meant that help was needed at home and so school had to wait.



In the fall of 1931, after working on the farm for one year, Mac registered in Normal School. The goal was to obtain a teaching certificate, since teaching was the one way that income could be obtained to allow a person to pursue a non-farm career. The problem was that, if he was eventually to teach, he needed to complete his final year of high school. Mac, who never tired of telling the story, said his whole future hung on completing his high school work that summer. The action of one person, G.S. Lord, principal of the Normal School, made the difference. Lord convinced the registrar that Mac could handle five courses in the summer, and he also loaned Mac \$20 to carry him through that period. (Mac never forgot this act of kindness and donated one of his paintings to the University of Alberta in memory of G.S. Lord.)

From this point Mac never looked back. He completed Normal School and for five years taught in a one-room schoolhouse covering eleven grades. During this time he also completed his first year at the University of Alberta by a combination of correspondence courses and summer school. In 1936

he enrolled in the university and graduated in 1940 with an honours degree in Economics, also receiving the Governor General's gold medal. He went directly to the University of Chicago, completing the course work and comprehensive exams by 1942. Mac then moved to Cambridge, Mass., for a year, where he was an instructor in economics at MIT. At this point, 1943, his life was to take another dramatic change. Mac had enlisted in the Air Force, but before he was moved to camp, W.A. Mackintosh (head of the Department of Economics and later principal of Queen's University) brought Mac to Ottawa to work with him, first in the Department of Finance and then, as victory seemed certain, on the newly formed Department of Reconstruction, which was charged with setting the social and economic policy agenda for post-war Canada. Over the years 1943-45, Mac, among his other activities, worked with a small group from the Dominion Bureau of Statistics to develop a modern set of National Accounts, comparable to those available in the United States and Britain; and he was instrumental in developing Canada's survey of investment intentions. Also, along with O.J. Firestone, he produced the first set of capital formation estimates for the private and public sectors, covering the years 1926-41.

After the war, Mac arranged to take up an appointment at Queen's University, which was to have begun in the spring of 1946. But the numbers of servicemen attending university were so great that he agreed to begin in the fall of 1945, with a heavy load of teaching and, as he later said, no time to prepare. He taught steadily through to the spring of 1947; at the same time, he was helping to develop a forecasting model in Ottawa. By his own admission this experience left him in poor health, and it took close to 10 years to fully recover from the extraordinary effort.

During the decade of the 1960s Mac was director of the Economic Institute at Queen's (1960-61); he was head of the department (1964-68); president of the Canadian Economics Association (1968-69); and a member of the Provincial Committee on the Healing Arts, where he wrote most of two of the three volumes of the final report. Mac was also at the centre of the building of a modern graduate program in economics and a modern faculty to complement this program. The graduate program had to be designed from scratch, and as there were no ground rules as guides and the hiring situation was desperate, it is hard to convey the hours of effort this enterprise took. To indicate the dimensions of the accomplishment, in 1960 the department had roughly six MA students; by 1968 there were just short of 100 graduate MA and PhD students registered in the economics graduate program on campus, and the faculty had grown from 8 to 28 over this same period. Mac's great pride was that in 1968, in a very tight labour market for new graduates, he hired 8 new faculty members.

The publication that establishes Mac as one of the major figures in Canadian economics is *Historical Statistics of Canada*. Mac was manager

and editor of the six-year project (1959-65), as well as its driving force. The volume includes 21 sections, each corresponding to a different area of the Canadian economy. Each division was headed by a section chief, drawn from among Canada's leading economists. Mac headed some of the sections. Since 1965 *Historical Statistics* has been the starting point for most work in Canadian economic history and the inspiration for a great deal of research. One marvels at the sense of unity that Mac brought to that volume, a work that has the imprint of such a strong editor that it appears to be the product of a single hand. The clarity and the comprehensiveness of *Historical Statistics* and the development of series that are of fundamental concern to those studying the Canadian economy have for the past nearly 40 years made possible a range of scholarship that we would not have seen otherwise. Testament to the care that Mac brought to the project, as he did to all his work, is the fact that, when after 15 years Statistics Canada produced a second edition of *Historical Statistics*, hardly any of the original series were revised. Mac was the driving force behind the second edition as well, although his involvement was much less.

The other monumental work, and indeed the crowning achievement of a career that spanned over 60 years, is his *Gross National Product, Canada, 1870-1926*. Until Mac and another team of collaborators produced the estimates, the period before 1926 (the year the Dominion Bureau of Statistics was established) was a grey, if not a black, hole in Canadian economic history. Figures existed, but some of them were rough and, many of us suspected—Mac included—seriously flawed. Begun in the late 1970s, shortly before Mac's official retirement, the first major report on the estimates came out in 1986 in a National Bureau of Economic Research volume. But it is the book providing the derivation of the estimates and published in 1993 that has become and will remain one of the two bibles of Canadian economic historians, *Historical Statistics* being the other. Since the estimates appeared, there already has been renewed interest in the period prior to 1926, with a reassessment of previously held views and research that has moved in quite new directions.

Mac's interests have ranged far beyond economics. An avid fisherman in his younger years and a devastating poker player, he also developed an interest in astronomy, art, and the classics, notably the works of Dante. Until illness prevented him, Mac came to the department almost every day. All of us and many of his former students and colleagues, with whom he kept in touch, benefited from his insight, his good humour, his experience, and his delight in having conversations on a wide range of subjects.

Mac Urquhart has been widely honoured for his achievements. He has honorary degrees from Queen's University and Bishop's University (Quebec); he was elected a fellow of the Royal Society of Canada in 1966 and from 1975 to 1976 was president of the Royal Society's Academy of the Hu-

manities and Social Sciences. In 1983 he received their prestigious Innis-Gérin Medal. The reading room on the third floor of Dunning Hall bears Mac Urquhart's name, as does a room in the Queen's University Club; and he is one of only eight to have received the University of Alberta Distinguished Alumni Award. Mac, who will be missed by all of us, is survived by his wife, Elizabeth, and his children, Anne Arrowsmith and David Arrowsmith.

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