

WILLIAM PETER ADAMS (1936–2018)

Peter Adams died on 28 September 2018 at the Peterborough Regional Health Centre, Peterborough, Ontario, at the age of 82. He is survived by his wife Jill; their children, Joanne, Michèle, Annette, and Will; their grandchildren, John, Matthew, Nathan, Anne, Marie, Adam, Aaron, Amélie, and Sofia; and Peter's siblings, Christine, Gareth, Glenys, and Kevin.

Peter was born in Ellesmere Port, a town on the Mersey Estuary in Cheshire, England, on 17 April 1936. He attended the King's School, Chester, founded by Henry VIII in 1541, and obtained his Bachelor of Arts from the University of Sheffield, where he also obtained a one-year teaching qualification. In 1959, having won a Carnegie Scholarship, he joined Dr. Fritz Müller at a base camp at the head of Expedition Fiord on the west side of Axel Heiberg Island for the reconnaissance season of the Jacobsen-McGill Axel Heiberg Expedition. For that season, it was just a two-man expedition, involving numerous mountain ascents to produce a base map of the surrounding area, plus the preliminary work of establishing a network of measurement sites for mass-balance studies of the Crusoe, White, and Baby glaciers. Peter spent the next few winters engaged in course work at McGill University, Montreal, and the next three summers on Axel Heiberg Island. He married Jill in Montreal in the summer of 1960.

Having spent the summer teaching at Brandon University, in early fall 1963 he took up the position of Director of the McGill Sub-Arctic Research Laboratory (now Station), located on the outskirts of the iron-mining town of Schefferville, close to the Québec-Labrador boundary. During his three-year directorship, a dozen Master of Science candidates each spent a full year at the Laboratory, working as weather observers and, under his supervision, pursuing projects such as a snow survey, a lake-ice survey, and permafrost studies, as well as their own field programmes. An avid runner throughout his life, Peter ran the Boston Marathon three times, as well as the Nunavut Midnight Sun Marathon at Arctic Bay and the Scott Base Run in the Antarctic. At Schefferville, he issued a standing order for the night weather observer to wake him whenever the temperature dropped below -50°F (-45°C) so that he might experience running at that temperature. He obtained his doctoral degree from McGill University in 1966, with a dissertation based on his mass-balance studies on the Axel Heiberg glaciers.

In 1966, Peter and Jill moved to Grenoble, France, where he worked at the Site nivo-météorologique du Col de Porte, operated by the Université Grenoble Alpes. Moving back to England, he taught for one year at the University of Exeter. Then in 1968, he became the founding chairman of the Department of Geography at Trent University in Peterborough, Ontario, continuing as chairman from then until 1977, and returning as a professor from 1990 until 1993. Peterborough would remain home for Peter and Jill for the next 50 years. Under Peter's chairmanship, there



Hon. Peter Adams (photo taken by his daughter Joanne Simpson).

was a strong emphasis on fieldwork, and he ran regular field courses in Schefferville and later on Axel Heiberg Island. Later in his career he held the positions, successively, of Dean of Graduate Studies, Associate Dean of Students, and Associate Vice-President Academic at Trent University. He also served a term as Executive Director of the Association of Canadian Universities for Northern Studies.

Peter's political career began with his election to the Kawartha Pine Ridge Public School Board, whose mandate included the public schools in Peterborough. Then in 1987, he was elected by a landslide as the Liberal Member of the Provincial Parliament for Peterborough under Premier David Peterson. He became the Member of Parliament for Peterborough in 1993 and was re-elected in 1997, 2000, and 2004, serving under Prime Ministers Jean Chrétien and then Paul Martin. In each of these elections he won more than 40% of the popular vote. Under Paul Martin he served as Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Development and to the Minister Responsible for Democratic Renewal. He was largely responsible for establishing the Millennial Scholarship Foundation and the system of Canada Research Chairs. As Member of Provincial Parliament (Ontario) and then Member of Parliament for Peterborough, he was readily

accessible to citizens, and he was a familiar sight on his daily runs around the streets of the city. Peter did not stand for re-election in 2006. After his retirement from politics, he described himself as a recovering politician; however, he joined Jill in her international volunteer work, including projects such as Sleeping Children Around the World (SCAW).

Peter was Peterborough's Citizen of the Year in 1981. In 2010, Trent University awarded him an honorary Doctor of Laws, and in 2012, he was awarded the Order of Ontario. He was also a Fellow of the Arctic Institute of North America. In addition to numerous articles on subjects such as lake ice and glacier mass balance and numerous reviews of books on Arctic subjects, he published several books. Particularly noteworthy is his book *Trent, McGill and the North* (2007), which is effectively an overview of his contribution to introducing students to northern field research. His twin passions were Peterborough and the Canadian Arctic. His achievement of combining in one lifetime the careers of a scientist, a university professor, an author, and a politician is truly impressive. He lived at a pace and with an intensity that few could sustain, and he influenced the lives of innumerable people significantly and positively.

He died on the eve of an event to mark the 50th anniversary of the Department of Geography at Trent University, the department that he had founded.

Appropriately, the event evolved into something of a celebration of his life, as too was the Memorial Service later held at St. John's Anglican Church in Peterborough.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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REFERENCE

- Adams, W.P. 2007. *Trent, McGill and the North: A story of Canada's growth as a sovereign polar nation*. Peterborough, Ontario: Cover to Cover Publication Services.

William Barr
Senior Research Associate
Arctic Institute of North America
University of Calgary
2500 University Drive NW
Calgary, Alberta, Canada T2N 1N4
circumpolarbill@gmail.com