

IN MEMORIAM – JOHN K. HARLEY

Former editor of the *McGill Journal of Education*

The McGill community lost a unique and beloved member in December when John Harley died of a heart attack while on holiday in England at the age of 71. John had gone to Britain to visit his relatives for the holidays. On December the 20th, 1990 he was at the railway station in Plymouth, Devon, with his brother Michael Harley, with whom he had been visiting. They were waiting for a lift when John suddenly lost consciousness and fell forward, never regaining consciousness.

John Kenhelm Harley was born in Scotland in 1919 and attended the notoriously spartan Gordonstoun School at the same time as the Duke of Edinburgh. He completed his undergraduate education in Scotland and obtained his master's and doctoral degrees at Harvard. He served during World War II in India, later emigrating to Canada. In 1964, after a period spent teaching in Manitoba, John joined the Faculty of Education at McGill.

As a faculty member in the Department of Education in English, he introduced new teaching ideas and developed a modular course for mature, post-degree students who could at that time obtain a teaching certificate from Quebec after a one-year course of special training. He eventually became chair of the department.

John Harley was an active participant during the time he served on Senate, always speaking up eloquently for his own faculty's concerns. To the great amusement of his fellow senators and with tongue firmly in cheek, he poked fun at that body in verse ("So here's to the Senate of Old McGill/Which has never made sense yet and never will"). In the last seven years of his McGill career, he acted as editor of the *McGill Journal of Education*. His former colleague and long-time friend, Paddy Webb-Hearsey says, "John wrote in an economical style very much his own. His unaffected, clear prose was full of humour and verve, pointed and honest. His verse was fun, in the way that Gilbert and Sullivan's lyrics were fun. They were sharp and concise, salty as the porridge he ate every day of his life, but never stodgy."

After his retirement in 1984, John published a collection of his Senate-inspired poetry in a volume entitled *Over the Hill: Disasters of*

a Poetaster, or the Senator's Revenge. In recognition of his talent and in appreciation for his humour, Senators passed a motion in 1986 making Harley the official Senate Poetaster (or paltry poet). Dean Abbott Conway says the appointment "was a way of saying thank you and seeing whether we couldn't get some more poems out of him!" Senate minutes were sent to his home in Hudson (Quebec) and if the muse inspired him, he sent back a poem to be read at a subsequent gathering. ("My heart leaps up when I behold/The minutes of the Senate/They speak to me of joys untold/Of silver speech and hours of gold/Of minds accumulating mould...").

He also used his talent for what he called "doggerel mongering" to write lyrics for musical productions in Hudson set to songs from Gilbert and Sullivan operettas. John Harley was considered to be a fine actor, especially in the commedia del arte style, and just a few weeks before his death, he directed a production of Edward Albee's *A Delicate Balance* performed by the Hudson Players.

Paddy Webb-Hearsey says John Harley will be sorely missed. "He was full of compassion and wit, a man who was liked by all his colleagues and loved by many. But John was also a man of opinions. He never forebore to stand up and say that something was going off the rails. I always admired him for that."

Professor Harley's remains were returned to Hudson, Quebec for interment. John's memorial service took place on December 29th at St. James Anglican Church in Hudson.

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Adapted from *The Reporter*, McGill University, January 9, 1991, and *The Hudson Gazette*.