

In Memoriam - Henry James

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Henry James, former head of the Psychology Department and former Dean of Arts and Science, passed away in Tatamagouche. Below is his full obituary.

JAMES, Henry (P.H.R.). With great sadness, we announce the passing of Henry James at the age of 95. Born February 7, 1924 in Bath, Somerset, England, to Percival Rowland James and his wife, Margaret Agnes Pinchon, Henry began his schooling at Tiverton Elementary School. At age 10, he attended Bristol Grammar School, a prominent independent day school in Bristol, England, founded in 1532. There, early on, it was discovered that he had a talent for Latin and Greek, with the result that, encouraged by his father, a teacher of history, he spent the next eight years in school, a time that might have been spent in other ways but instead spent almost entirely in translating Cicero's speeches into Churchillian English and Shakespearean plays into Greek verse. By grade 12, he had risen to being third in a class equally devoted (or condemned) to "The Classics". He won a bursary to Magdalene College, Cambridge, where he continued his translation of ancient Latin and Greek and "playing the fool". It was wartime and after a condensed period of time spent undertaking a University degree Henry volunteered for the Royal Navy. Prior to this period he had had an interview with a person he later realized was probably in British Intelligence. "Ordinary Seaman James" did basic naval training at H.M.S. Ganges, a barracks in Ipswich. At his passing out parade as a midshipman, and expecting to join the Pacific theatre, he was surprised to be ordered to march off the parade ground away from his colleagues. Because of his memory and proficiency with languages, he was selected to work in naval signals and instructed to proceed to the School of Oriental and African Studies, London University, where he was to spend the next six months learning Japanese, and eventually became a Japanese translator of naval code at the secret, now famous, decoding and cryptanalysis station at Bletchley Park, in North London, probably in Hut 7. During this period, Henry met his future wife, Denise Willi (Jenny) who was in the Women's Royal Naval Service. By the end of the war, Henry was rated Lieutenant James RNVR. Later war service saw him relocate to Colombo along with other Bletchley personnel. This gave him access to a Jeep and the opportunity to view Pacific culture, of which he later said he regretted learning little. But he spoke limited Japanese until his death, on November 21.

After the war, Henry returned to Cambridge where he switched from the Classics to Psychology. He received a first class honours in the final exams and immediately took a research job in the Department of Psychology at Cambridge, where he met many of the country's academic leaders. After a couple of years there, he and Jenny and their new daughter Kate, travelled to the United States, where he taught at Harvard for a year, in Cambridge, Mass; then back to England to University College, London. It was here that Henry received his doctorate. Also during this time, Henry and Jenny's second daughter, Sara, was born on Christmas Eve 1953. In 1957, they all crossed the Atlantic to join Queen's University, in Kingston, Ontario.

In 1962, Henry was offered the position of Head of a very small Psychology Department at Dalhousie University, Halifax, N.S. "Henry the Navigator", as he was dubbed by his colleagues, soon built up a very reputable Department which, by 1969, was ranked fourth in Canada behind McGill, Toronto, and McMaster. Henry went on to become Dean of Arts and Science after which he was appointed a Killam Research Professor and undertook a great deal of novel work with the seals of Sable Island, much of it somewhat unfulfilled however. Within sight of retirement, he was finally invited to Mount Allison University, to head their Psychology Department, and remained there for four years after making a number of ambitious recruitments.

Henry then completely retired to his beloved farm property in West New Annan, Tatamagouche, where, over the years, he and Jenny raised sheep, kept milk cows, and grew wonderful vegetable and flower gardens. He enjoyed pottery and became quite adept at cabinet-making. Over the years, he gathered many friends, with varying interests, who added a great deal of pleasure to his life. He was a gifted conversationalist with an engaging mind and clever wit, and will be remembered for the marvellous conversations at his house, over a glass of good scotch. Aided by an inherent reserve, he could manage in his own company, however, albeit he enjoyed people, even if not all people, and certainly not without discrimination. He thrived in company that he could engage and often dominate, which made him a popular Head of Department, and he had a thirst for knowledge, history and languages. In his final years he concentrated on sociobiology and human evolution, and the journey of humankind from Africa, especially into Asia. He was energized by the multiplicity of recently discovered hominid species, that still have to find their approved place in the evolutionary tree, and that have revolutionized the story of evolution among human species. His abilities were augmented by a burning curiosity for what fascinated him, a love of discussion and even argument, and a consummate skill in English grammar. Additionally he was fearless in spending money.

He was predeceased by his wife, Jenny; his daughter, Kate (Carmichael); and sister, Margaret Mary (Cunningham). Remaining are his daughter, Sara Bonnyman (Alan) Tatamagouche, 5 grandchildren, and 1 great-grandchild.

Arrangements are entrusted to Coulter's Funeral Home, Tatamagouche. There will be no funeral, by request.