

LEIGHTON, Dr. ALEXANDER HAMILTON

IN MEMORIAM

Dr. ALEXANDER HAMILTON LEIGHTON passed away quietly on August 11th, 2007 at his home in Joggins Bridge shortly after his 99th birthday. Born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, he came to Nova Scotia with his parents for the first time in 1916, at the age of eight. This began a rich and enduring relationship with Nova Scotia and its people. In his adopted Province, Alec Leighton made a lasting contribution to medical research and public health, he explored its landscapes and wrote about its natural beauty, and he recorded and documented its life and history.

Dr. Leighton had an extraordinary breadth of interest and an equally exceptional depth of understanding in the many aspects of his multi-faceted career as a psychiatrist, anthropologist, and sociologist.

He studied biology at Princeton University, with an emphasis on animal behaviour. He then studied medicine and psychiatry at Cambridge University and John's Hopkins University where he trained under Dr. Adolf Meyer of Johns Hopkins who also trained Dr. Robert O. Jones, the first head of Dalhousie's Department of Psychiatry. The Meyerian approach was fundamental to Dr. Leighton's research and to the clinical orientation of Dr. Jones.

Following the Second World War, he became a professor in the Colleges of Arts and Science and of Medicine at Cornell University. From there, he re-established ties with Nova Scotia by founding a research program, known as the Stirling County Study, which focused on depression and anxiety and their relationships to life circumstances and social conditions. The study was begun in 1948, at the time when Robert O. Jones was establishing a new Department of Psychiatry at Dalhousie University. Alec Leighton and Bob Jones had known each other from early childhood in Nova Scotia and, later, as residents in psychiatry at Johns Hopkins. The Stirling County Study prospered from its early association with Dalhousie and from the long-term support of the governments of both Canada and the United States. In collaboration with his wife, Jane Murphy Leighton, the Study was extended and today continues to address trends and outcomes of depression and anxiety over time.

In 1966, Alec Leighton moved from Cornell to the Harvard School of Public Health where he was recruited to found a new Department of Behavioral Sciences. On retiring from Harvard in 1975, he received a National Health Scientist Award from the Government of Canada and was appointed Professor of Psychiatry and of Community Health and Epidemiology in the Faculty of Medicine of Dalhousie. He received numerous awards as well as honorary degrees from Acadia and Laval Universities.

Beyond the scientific, Alec Leighton's roots in Nova Scotia were deep and personal. From his early youth, he developed close friendships among the Bear River First Nation and the woodsmen of the back country, and he traveled the woods, lakes and rivers with them often. In 1927, at age 19, he and a small party canoed right across the Province from Lake Joli near Bear River to Jordan Falls near Shelburne. Even more unusual, he documented this trip on 16mm movie film, and, in these and subsequent years, he filmed many other traditions and events in the province: the behaviour of beavers in summer, a winter hunt for wild cats, a traditional hunt for porpoises from a birch bark canoe. He learned the history of the province from the tales and stories of his companions and from study of an impressive personal library. He made a special study of the origin of Jerome, the mysterious castaway found on the shores of the Bay of Fundy in the late 1800s, and reported his findings and conclusions to the Dalhousie Society for the History of Medicine. With the passage of time, Alec Leighton's films and remembered oral history themselves became unique records and important primary documents for another

generation of amateur and professional historians. Alec Leighton loved this Province. He studied it, experienced it and gloried in it, and left it the richer for his having lived here.

Alec Leighton is survived by his wife, Jane M. Murphy, Ph.D, who currently holds the appointment of Adjunct Professor of Psychiatry in the Dalhousie Department of Psychiatry. Her primary are: Professor of Psychiatry, Massachusetts General Hospital, Harvard Medical School and Professor of Epidemiology in the Harvard School of Public Health.

He is also survived by a daughter, Dr. Doreen Leighton Walker of California, a son, Dr. Ted Leighton of Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, and 5 grandchildren. He was pre-deceased by his Irish-born parents, Archibald Leighton and Gertrude Hamilton, his first wife, Dorothea Cross, and his sister, Gertrude. A memorial service was held at the St. Anne's Birch Chapel in Smith's Cove, Nova Scotia on Tuesday, August 14, 2007. Memorial donations can be made to the Digby & Area Health Service Charitable Foundation, PO Box 820, Digby, Nova Scotia, B0V 1A0