

Martin Wesley Johns , 1913-2008

Dr. Martin Wesley Johns Martin Wesley Johns, Professor Emeritus of Physics at McMaster University, passed away on September 18, 2008, in his 96th year. He was well known for his long lifetime of unselfish service to the scientific, university, church, and social services communities of Canada. Martin was born in China in 1913 of Canadian missionary parents, and was 12 years old when his family returned permanently to Canada. He completed his B.A. (1932) and M.A. (1934) at McMaster University, and his Ph.D. (1938) at the University of Toronto. His academic and scientific career then included nine years as Professor of Physics at Brandon College (1937-1946), a year at the Chalk River laboratories (1946-1947), and 34 years at McMaster University (1947-1981).

At McMaster he was Chair of the Department of Physics for a total of twelve years, including the period when universities expanded rapidly in the 1960's, and his foresight was important in selecting about twenty new faculty members to form a strong and harmonious department which proved to be productive for the decades since. As his time for normal mandatory retirement approached he was asked to continue at McMaster and serve as Coordinator of Part Time Degree Studies. During his four years in this position (1977-1981) he expanded the size and popularity of that department considerably.

His research in the field of Nuclear Structure Physics, using experimental techniques of beta and gamma spectroscopy, is well respected internationally. He supervised the construction of several spectrometers and was a prime mover in establishing the Tandem Van de Graaff Accelerator Laboratory at McMaster. He co-authored about one hundred papers in scientific journals, received honorary D.Sc. degrees from Brandon University and McMaster, and in 1958 was admitted to the Royal Society of Canada.

In 1960, during a Sabbatical leave at Oxford, he was sent to Pakistan for nearly three months as a technical advisor for the Canadian Department of External Affairs, to assess whether Pakistani nuclear scientists and researchers possessed the expertise necessary to handle the nuclear reactor that Pakistan was requesting from Canada as part of the Colombo plan.

Martin also had a very active role in Community Services outside the University. He was named "Distinguished Citizen of the Year for 1978" for Hamilton, Ontario, in part due to his service to the United Way and the Family Service Agency. He was an active supporter of the Hamilton United Way, serving as both the Chair of its Allocations Committee and as President of its Board for the Hamilton-Burlington area. For many years he was heavily involved with the Family Service movement, having served as President of Family Services of Hamilton Wentworth, as well as President of the Family Service organization at the provincial (Ontario) and federal levels.

He actively supported Westdale United Church in Hamilton for over sixty years, and served the United Church of Canada in several positions up to the national level. In 1999 Westdale United Church named its church hall "The Martin Johns Hall" in view of his years of selfless work and

generosity.

One project of which he was most proud in recent years was the Campus Ministries Council he established and supported generously at McMaster University. It is an interfaith chaplaincy which serves all Christian denominations and non-Christian communities as well. The interfaith and inter-racial work of this group is an example of Martin's influence and efforts, which continued more than 25 years after his official retirement.

Martin was always very generous with his time, talents, and resources, and had a well-deserved reputation for treating people fairly. One notable skill was his ability to understand and deal with people. While chairing a committee or department he would usually manage to achieve consensus on difficult issues, avoiding political maneuvering or narrow votes that would leave some people dissatisfied. This skill was also used widely in his everyday life. Students would often consult him for advice on personal issues as well as academic matters. He was held in great respect by his grandchildren, who confided in him and communicated regularly by e-mail, discussing personal problems and asking for advice.

His well-rounded outlook and range of interests is shown by some of his other activities. For many years he sang in the Bach-Elgar choir, and held season's tickets for the Hamilton Philharmonic Orchestra, Opera Hamilton, and the Hamilton Tiger Cats Football games. At his Lake Boshkung summer cottage in the Haliburton region he enjoyed carpentry and sailing, and in his sixties took up windsurfing. Also, at that age he could more than hold his own on the squash court against students who were forty years younger! In later years he learned to use a computer and wrote three autobiographical books. The first of these, "Bamboo Sprouts and Maple Buds", provides many interesting insights from his early years in China. (It has recently been reprinted in hardcover by his granddaughters Sarah Turner and Alison Crump, and is available for purchase online at [www.lulu.com/content/4059218/](http://www.lulu.com/content/4059218/).)

Martin was part of a family that was very active in the academic and professional communities of Canada. After their return from China his father, Alfred Johns, held Faculty positions in the Departments of Mathematics at Brandon College (1927-1931) and McMaster University (1931-1952). Martin had three younger brothers and one sister. His brother Harold was well known to the scientific community for developing the first Cobalt-60 radiation therapy unit (at Saskatoon), and for his many years of work in Medical Physics at Toronto. Paul had a career in meteorology, and Edward was an orthodontist. Ruth was trained as a social worker and spent many years working in that field. Martin is survived by his sister Ruth, brother Paul, daughter Beth, son Ken, nine grandchildren and two great-grandchildren.

Dennis Burke  
Professor, McMaster University, Retired