

NATIVE OF BLOOMFIELD

Prominent Canadian geologist is dead

On February 3rd, 1974 a long, active life came to its end in Vancouver with the death at the age of 90 of Merton Yarwood Williams, B.Sc. (Queen's), Ph.D. (Yale), D.Sc. (U.B.C.), F.R.S.C., F.G.S.A., Professor Emeritus and formerly Head of the Department of Geology and

Geography at the University of British Columbia. Born in 1883 in Bloomfield, Prince Edward County, of United Empire Loyalist stock, Dr. Williams received his early education in Bloomfield and Picton, with one year at Westown Boarding School In Pennsylvania. In 1909 he graduated from Queen's University with the degree of B.Sc. in mining engineering, followed in 1912 by the degree of Ph.D. from Yale University. He then joined the Geological Survey of Canada, eventually becoming geologist in charge of petroleum investigations. At this juncture, his explorations were confined largely to Ontario, but during the course of his life he was to travel Canada literally from sea to sea in scientific journeys and investigations.

In 1921, he joined the staff of the University of British Columbia as associate professor of stratigraphy and palaeontology, becoming professor in the same year. In 1935 he became head of the department of geology and geography. On his retirement in 1950, he was appointed professor emeritus and honorary curator of the geological museum. At the spring congregation in 1972, the university conferred upon him the honorary degree of D.Sc. in recognition of his distinguished services to the University, to British Columbia and to Canada.

For Dr. Williams, retirement did not mean inaction. During the next two decades he was a familiar figure on the campus where he still had his office. He participated in the laying of the cornerstone of the new Geological Sciences Centre and was present at its formal opening in 1972. In the new building the museum to which he had given so many years of devoted work in

known as the M. Y. Williams Museum.

Throughout the years, Dr. Williams spent almost every summer carrying out geological work on petroleum and mineral resources in the course of which he explored the Mackenzie River Valley, going down the river to its mouth; Southern Alberta and Saskatchewan; the Peace River area; the area bordering the Alaska Highway. During a year's leave of absence from the university, he was a member of a team of Canadian scientists under Dean R. W. Brock of UBC who carried out for the British Government the first geological survey of the Crown Colony of Hong Kong.

During the summers of 1929-30 he was in charge of non-metallic mineral investigations on the Pacific Great Eastern survey of resources of the Peace River, West Cariboo and West Lilloet Blocks, B.C. As a consultant for the Shell Oil Co., he conducted extensive oil investigations in Western Canada. In 1944 he was appointed to the advisory board of the Scientific and Industrial Research Council of B.C. which replaced the War Metals Research Board of which Dr. Williams was a founder.

Among the many scientific and professional organizations of which Dr. Williams was a member were the Geological Society of America of which he was vice-president in 1945-46; the Canadian Institute of Mining and Metallurgy; the Palaeontology Society of America; the Association of Professional Engineers of B.C. He had been a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada since 1926 and became its president in 1960-61. He was also a charter fellow of the Canadian Geographical Society and a Western

Over the years, Dr. Williams was author of a long list of publications, relating not only to his scientific and professional work, but also to more personal interests. From early life he had been a student of ornithology, and had learned the art of preserving birds, and had written articles on birds he had observed in his travels. His large collection of stuffed birds was donated to the Vancouver Museum.

He never lost his love for the beautiful and historic part of Canada in which he spent his boyhood to which he frequently returned to visit his brother, John P. Williams of Picton. As a consequence, he devoted years of patient research to a genealogical study of well-known pioneer Prince Edward County families with whom his own family forbears had inter-married,—Bowerman, Mullett, Haight, Young, Williams and Long.

Patient study bore fruit in some 10 private volumes, copies of which are in the hands of

individual members of the wide family connection. Copies were also placed in the Ontario Archives because of their historic and sociological value. Articles of more general interest along this line appeared in the Canadian Geographical Journal.

Dr. Williams is survived by his son, Dr. E. P. Williams of Calgary, who has followed in his father's footsteps as a geologist, two daughters, Miss Margaret Williams and Mrs. Kathleen Carruthers, both of Vancouver, six grandchildren, one great grandchild, nieces and nephews. He was predeceased by his wife, Lula, and two brothers, Dr. T. B. Williams and John P. Williams and both born in Prince Edward County.

So, with the death at an advanced age of the last surviving member of the senior generation of a pioneer Prince Edward County family, comes to a close an era which began in the comparative simplicity of the Victorian age and ended in the complex, anxious turmoil of to-day.

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