

JOHN TUZO WILSON, 1908 - 1993

I remember, very clearly, the first time that I began to appreciate the stature of my thesis supervisor. It was in Hart House Theatre at the University of Toronto when the Royal Society of Canada presented him with the Willet G. Miller Medal -- awarded to recipients who "were in their prime - not too old to continue such original work". We learned then that Tuzo, who was born in Ottawa, Ontario on October 24, 1908, had graduated from Physics and Geology at the University of Toronto in 1930, winning a Massey Fellowship, the Coleman Gold Medal in Geology, and the Governor General's Medal. Two years later he had received an M.A. from Cambridge and, in 1936, a Ph.D. from Princeton.

Following three years with the Geological Survey of Canada, he was commissioned in the 1st Tunnelling Company of the Royal Canadian Engineers, then became Director of Operational Research at the National Defence Headquarters. During the winter of 1945-46, he was Deputy Director of Expedition Musk Ox in the Canadian Arctic, and later flew as a Canadian observer on the first USAF flight over the North Pole.

He began his next career in 1946, as Professor of Physics at the University of Toronto, where he held an appointment until his death in 1993. His scientific accomplishments were immense. He had an enviable ability to absorb and synthesize information from his readings and from his travels. He was always at the forefront of the earth sciences. He was a major contributor to the understanding that the Canadian shield can be divided into geological provinces according to their structure and age. He is remembered for his early ideas about island arcs and



Tuzo Wilson receiving the Albatross Award of the American Miscellaneous Society, in Hart House, University of Toronto. Standing with Wilson in the picture are Art Maxwell and Teddy Bullard and an unknown albatross. For Tuzo the continents moved.

the fracture of a brittle crust, and for his later ideas about continental drift and plate tectonics. His name is forever linked with such diverse concepts as transform faults, hot spots and mantle plumes, and the myriad of earth processes that are expressed in the geological character of the earth. These and other accomplishments led to Fellowship in the Royal Society in 1968 and the award, in 1978, of the Vetlesan gold medal, considered to be the earth sciences' equivalent of the Nobel prize.

A few years later, he became one of the first North Americans to travel to China when that became possible (typically going by the Trans Siberian Railway) and many will remember his book "One Chinese Moon" that was based on the visit.

In the Spring of 1967, it was announced that he was to become the new Principal of Erindale College. This recognition of his Alma Mater was very important to him at that particular time in his career. In 1974 he became Director of the Ontario Science Centre, of which he was justly proud. He held this position until 1985. His curiosity took him everywhere and into many disciplines.

He was elected President of the American Geophysical Union, before someone discovered that this post was not available to non-Americans. The gracious solution of the AGU was to revise the offending terms in their constitution. But most importantly, we remember him because we liked him so much.

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