

Robert James (Bob) Morgan, PhD, 1938-2011

Robert James (Bob) Morgan, former Director of the Beaton Institute archives, Cape Breton University, passed away June 4th, 2011. Bob is remembered for his outstanding contributions to the archival community, the heritage sector, and the scholarly field of local history, particularly the history of Cape Breton Island. In all Bob's involvements he brought a joyful enthusiasm and genuine respect for the opinions of others. He loved to conduct research and shared freely that research in the classroom, with researchers in the archives, and the community through his many public lectures and publications.

Born and raised in Windsor Ontario, Bob received his BA Honours in History and English from the University of Windsor in 1961. Following graduation, Bob travelled to Cape Breton to take up a summer lecturing position at Xavier College in Sydney, Nova Scotia. Bob continued to lecture at the College during the summers while pursuing his MA in Canadian History at Queen's University. It was during his studies at Queen's that Bob met his future wife Barbara (Babs) MacKinnon, a native of Inverness, Cape Breton. Upon completion of his MA in 1964 Bob was promoted to Assistant Professor at Xavier College where he taught until 1966.

While teaching at Xavier College Bob became involved with a small but action-oriented group keen to save an aging and derelict stone church in the North End of Sydney. The church eventually became known as St. Patrick's Church Museum and the group formed themselves into the Old Sydney Society in 1966. Their success continues today as the Old Sydney Society is in its 45th year and Bob was Secretary of the Board at the time of his passing. The Old Sydney Society has grown from its initial incarnation of one church museum to include the operation of the Centre for Heritage and Science in the historic Lyceum Building, the Jost House Museum and Cossit House Museum all situated in Nova Scotia's only designated historic district – Sydney's North End.

In 1966 Bob, with his wife Babs, returned to Ottawa where he worked as an archivist at the Public Archives of Canada until 1968. However, his interest in the colonial period of Cape Breton history led Bob to enrol in the History program at the University of Ottawa. Bob undertook his doctoral studies in 1969, followed by a year in Montreal where he worked on his thesis and lectured



at Loyola College from 1970-1971. Bob was conferred his Ph.D. in 1972.

Again, Cape Breton called! Bob was offered the position of Senior Historian at the Fortress of Louisbourg National Historic Park. As Senior Historian from 1971-1976 Bob helped to shape the interpretation of the largest historic reconstruction site in North America. His keen interest in social history meant he brought the lives of these early settlers, citizens and militia to life and encouraged Cape Bretoners, Nova Scotians, and Canadians to know and engage in their past.

In 1976, following the tragic loss of Sr. Margaret Beaton, College of Cape Breton (today Cape Breton University) Principal Fr. MacLellan approached Bob to join the history faculty and become

the Director of the Beaton Institute archives. During his time as Director, Bob transformed the archives into a research centre out of which has grown the wealth of regional and Cape Breton studies, research, and programming.

Bob was also an advocate of Nova Scotia's growing community archives and museum movement. In 1982 he chaired the first organizational meeting of what would become the Council of Nova Scotia Archives (CNSA). He then served as the CNSA's first president from 1983-1985. Bob left his mark on the Nova Scotia archival community, laying a strong foundation for other archivists to build upon.

While Bob's early years were spent teaching Canadian History, his research and interests became focused on local history. Bob, through his 28 years as a member of the history faculty with Cape Breton University, was instrumental in establishing the programs of Cape Breton Studies, Cultural Studies, and Museum Studies. His dynamic personality in the classroom led to lively discussions over "tea" at the archives with faculty and students. In 1990 Bob was appointed Cape Breton University's first Dean of Research and Development. His reputation as a teacher continued after his retirement as his courses through the CBU Senior's College were regularly oversubscribed.

Bob's legacy to the public body of historical literature is perhaps the culmination of his excellence in the archive, museum, and classroom. He published four books focusing on the history of

Cape Breton Island including the two volume history of Cape Breton Island entitled *Rise Again! The Story of Cape Breton Island in 2008 and 2009*; *Perseverance: The Story of Cape Breton's University College (1952-2002)* in 2004; and *Early Cape Breton: From Founding to Famine* in 2000. Bob also published broadly on the history of 18th century Louisbourg, the Loyalist founding, and early history of Sydney and the 19th century Cape Breton separatist movement in journals such as *Dalhousie Review*, *Revue de l'Université d'Ottawa*, *Les Cahiers de la Société historique acadienne*, *Canadian Geographical Journal*, *Nova Scotia Historical Review*, and the *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*.

Bob recently recalled during an interview his first trip over Kelly's Mountain travelling from Sydney to Inverness with Babs. They stopped at St. Anne's look off to take in the view, and he

knew at that moment he had fallen in love with Cape Breton Island, its rugged landscape, the warmth of its people, its deep history, and living culture. While Bob was a "come from away" he adopted Cape Breton as his home and the entire Island has benefited from his commitment to history, culture, and the Island's documentary heritage. Bob's character made him the natural "go to guy" for advice, expertise, and leadership of which he gave freely. He will be sorrowfully missed.

Catherine Arseneau,
Beaton Institute, Cape Breton University

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