

## **Where It Began The Economics Department When Tony Scott Joined The Faculty**

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At his memorial service, we heard a lot about Tony's accomplishments as a faculty member and head of the Department of Economics at UBC -- about how he was instrumental in transforming the department, beginning the difficult process of assembling a highly professional faculty, introducing a meaningful graduate program, establishing a program in natural resource economics that populated the Canadian profession (and beyond) and generally fostering scholarship and research. With this in mind, I thought some of you might be interested in knowing where it began. What was the Economics Department like when Tony arrived on the scene in 1953?

Tony was appointed as an instructor in Economics at the beginning of the academic year 1953-54, when I was in my fourth year in the Economics honours program. I did not take any courses from Tony, but I was his student assistant. Of all possible subjects, he was assigned to teach introductory statistics and I was supposed to help students with their lab work. So, although I was not his student, I saw a lot of Tony and got to know him -- but this note is about the department as it then was, not about Tony. My perspective, of course, is that of a student, at least what remains in my memory about my undergraduate years (aided by a look at the UBC Calendars for those years).

From something in the neighbourhood of 2000 students each year before World War II and 2500 students in the war years, enrollment in the university jumped to just under 9400 in 1947-48 as veterans crowded into the classrooms. The permanent facilities of the university were modest, designed for the small enrolment of the prewar years. The few permanent buildings were interspersed with large open spaces. To accommodate the enrolment surge, they were augmented by plywood huts --- tarpaper shacks -- liberated from a nearby army base and used as offices, class rooms and student dormitories (I lived for three years in such a hut). From the 1947-48 peak, enrolment dropped precipitously as the veterans graduated and moved on. The year before Tony arrived, 1952-53, was the low point, with 5355 students. This was still more than double the prewar enrolment, so the "temporary buildings" remained and were a feature of the campus for many years afterwards as enrolment continued to increase. The main Economics offices were in what was then called the Arts Building, the old structure behind the Koerner Library that is now occupied by Mathematics. Tony had his office in one of the temporary buildings just to the north of what is now the Geography building.

In fact there was no Department of Economics in 1953-54. There was a Department of Economics, Political Science, Sociology and Anthropology (Commerce had been spun off some years earlier) presided over by Henry Angus, a distinguished political scientist, who was also Dean of Graduate Studies. At that time, departments did not have chairs, they had heads, and many, if not all, heads had what was in effect tenure as head, i.e., appointment "without term" as head. Some were in place for many, many years.

The Calendar listed 19 faculty members in the Department of E,PS,S and A in 1953-54, of whom eight were economists, but only six were teaching Economics courses. I am excluding an

agricultural economist who did not teach courses in the department and Robert Clark who was on leave that year, but including Hans Ronimois whose courses were economics courses but listed in Slavonic Studies and two who taught courses but were not regular faculty members. Tuition fees were \$138 for the winter session, September through April -- perhaps \$1200 in 2015 dollars, but much more burdensome for families like mine, given average income levels. Almost all courses -- and all courses in Economics -- lasted the whole academic year. 21 Economics courses were listed in the calendar, but not all were offered each year. There were two first year courses, a survey course on the Economic History of Europe and a course called Political Economy, an introductory course intended for students who did not plan to major in Economics. It was taught by a young Political Scientist. The Principles course was in the second year, numbered, as it was for years and years, Economics 200. The upper division courses covered the normal range of fields: theory; money and banking; international trade; government finance; labour; history of thought; statistics (2 courses); business cycles; transportation; and economic history (2 courses). There was also a fourth-year seminar and graduating essay for honours students. A number of courses in Commerce and Agricultural Economics could be taken for credit in Economics as well as Ronimois' three in Slavonic Studies. The department also listed an MA program that included a course on modern theory, a seminar and a thesis. I know some students enrolled in the MA program, but in my two years as an honours student I was not aware of any such students. The one graduate student that I remember taking some classes with me was in Agricultural Economics.

Who were the regular faculty?

**Joseph Crumb** was the heart and soul of the Economics program. A native of Washington State, with a Ph.D. from the University of California, he had joined the department in 1939 as a lecturer and had served diligently through the very difficult years of the Veteran's surge. In my years as a student he was responsible for the core of the undergraduate program -- the principles course and what we would now call intermediate micro theory. The theory course was a full year of microeconomics based on Boulding's *Economic Analysis* and Stigler's *Theory of Price*, two standard textbooks of the time. My recollection is that it was a demanding, thorough course. However, Joe's particular baby was a course in Money and Banking, which contained most of the macroeconomics that was usually offered in the department. Joe had been a bank examiner in earlier years and so had particular expertise in banking (perhaps by then rather dated). His macroeconomics was even more dated, steeped in Fisher and Keynes' *Treatise on Money*. He demonstrated limited understanding of (or interest in) the macroeconomics of the *General Theory*, which, of course, was then all the rage. I am not aware of any scholarly publications by Joe. His one written work with which I am familiar is a volume called *Lessons in Money and Banking*, a digest of his lectures prepared in 1943 for the use of prisoners of war. It was listed as suggested reading for his course and needless to say, it was eagerly sought after by his students. Joe was dedicated and kind. He always exuded an air of one who was harassed and over-worked, but he was always approachable by students. To me, he was generous with his time and he went out of his way to meet and talk with my over-awed parents who came down from the backwoods for my graduation.

The most senior member of the economics faculty, in point of service, was **George Drummond**, a Scottish born empirically-minded economist. His son, Ian, was my classmate and later a distinguished economic historian. Drummond regularly taught the second course in statistics, but seems to have been kept away from the core theory courses. He was a skeptic and severe critic of marginal analysis in economics. In my fourth year, he was a very sad case. He had had a stroke sometime in 1952 or early 1953 that had incapacitated him physically and probably mentally. Apparently, the university had no provision for disability, so he continued to meet some classes. I don't know if he had other responsibilities that year, but he was in charge of the

compulsory fourth year honours seminar. We were scheduled to meet in one of the shacks on the West Mall that was imperfectly accessible for a man in a wheel chair, so after a couple of sessions there we met for the rest of the year at his home, which was nearby. The subject of the seminar was a two volume work by Richard Clemence, *Readings in Economic Analysis*, a collection of papers critical of contemporary economic theorizing. We each took turns presenting the papers, but Drummond could not keep awake. On those occasions when he dropped off in a very sound sleep we all packed up and left him in peace. It is a sad commentary on the intellectual commitment of the class that we did not make the best of a bad situation and turn the course into a vigorous, student-led seminar. The whole experience was not a reflection on George Drummond - who, in my impression, had been a powerful, if cranky and not always popular, intellect -- but a commentary on the immaturity of the university as an employer.

**Stewart Jamieson** was the other senior stalwart of the department. He came from a family that was very active in left-wing politics in the province and that political mantra was well imprinted on him. He taught Labour Economics and in alternate years Canadian and American Economic History, as well as a section of Principles. He was not a scintillating teacher, but he was thoughtful and had a deep knowledge of labour relations in the province that he was always willing to share with students. I developed deep admiration and respect for him when I was his research assistant on a large, interdisciplinary research project on the Indians of British Columbia. However, it is perhaps an indicator of the thinness of the intellectual resources in the Department that, when on a drive somewhere, Stu turned to me and asked, "Ron, do you have a book on international economics that you can lend to me?" He had been assigned to teach the course the following year, but had never taken a course in the subject. I lent him my copy of the book we had used as a text. I don't know if he actually taught the course -- he never returned my book.

**Robert Clark** was a relatively new assistant professor. Students either loved him or hated him. I had neither reaction. I did not take a course from him and so escaped the grade-lowering embarrassment that followed when he found faulty spelling and grammar or bad handwriting in papers and examinations. Robert regularly taught statistics (one of his textbooks was on calligraphy, presumably to improve the presentation of data), government finance and a fourth-year course on Business Cycles. I do not count this course as part of the theory offerings of the department because it was more in the nature of a course in the history of thought. Robert had a Harvard PhD, and was something of a disciple of Schumpeter, which coloured much of his teaching. In 1953-54 Robert was on leave. He had arranged an exchange with the University of Manchester, which saw him go to Manchester and one of its professors, John Mars (of whom more below), come to UBC. Robert was perhaps the most active researcher in the department, concentrating on issues in local municipal finance. He may also have begun work on pensions and pension plans that he published later.

**Hans Ronimois** was the other regular faculty member -- but perhaps not so "regular." He had a joint appointment in Economics and Slavonic Studies, but none of his courses was labelled "Economics." Although they were Economics in content and could be taken for credit in Economics, they were formally courses in Slavonic Studies. I later learned that his status in Economics was a matter of prolonged agony. He considered himself to be a member of the Economics Department and fought to maintain that status, but, for reasons I never understood, members of the Department were not welcoming. Many years later, when I was head of the department, I discovered that the issue was resolved. His name had been removed from the list of budgeted position in Economics and to his vocal distress (in my office, several times) he was definitively settled in Slavonic Studies. Hans was a refugee from Soviet tyranny. It is my understanding that in their escape his wife was killed, which probably explains the ever-present air of sadness that surrounded the man and

contributed to his bitterness toward the Soviet Union and the institutions of the Soviet economy. He obtained his Ph.D. from the London School of Economics where he was a student of Lionel Robbins, then one of the gurus of neo-classical microeconomics. Hans carefully and systematically applied that theoretical framework to analyze the workings and the failings of Soviet industrial firms and established to his own satisfaction that the system ground the people into poverty and would inevitably collapse in periods of what he called "chaos-crisis." Bob Mundell, who much later won a Nobel Prize in Economics, was a year ahead of me, taking combined honours in Slavonic Studies and Economics. As students, we were good friends. Some years later Bob told me that he had learned more economics from Hans Ronimois than he had learned from all of the rest of the members of the Department combined. Hans was not an active producer of professional scholarship.

Those were the regular faculty members: Crumb, Drummond, Jamieson, Clark and Ronimois. Then there were what I will call the "occasionals," people who taught courses for a short time then moved on.

I will mention **Jim Harvey** in this connection, although he was no longer at UBC when Tony arrived. I know little about Harvey. Apparently he had no graduate degree in Economics, but he presented a very systematic and thorough course in introductory Statistics when I was in my third year. However, I may be alone in my assessment of the quality of the course. Most of the students hated him (many of them Commerce students) and he was no longer present when I returned to UBC for my fourth year. He was replaced by another "occasional", **Eugene Snyder**, with an MA from California but no Ph.D. I took International Economics from Snyder, but sadly I have almost no memory of him. I guess he was not the most memorable of instructors, neither memorably good nor memorably bad.

The third occasional, however, is burned in my memory. **John Mars** was the Manchester professor who replaced Robert Clark in 1953-54. He was a phenomenon. Tall and lanky, with a flowing shock of white hair, he bounced around at the front of the classroom gesticulating and articulating the topic of the day. I took two courses from him, Business Cycles and the second statistics course. His Business Cycles course was not the traditional history of thought course that Robert Clark had developed. He rubbed our minds in what were some of the leading topics in macroeconomics of the day. The fall term was devoted mainly to theories of expectations, with particular emphasis on the writings of another English scholar, G. L. S. Shackle, who rejected the traditional probability approaches to expectations in favour of psychology-based approaches that focused on uncertainty. Like Shackle, Mars used this unorthodox approach to expectations to criticize aspects of the Keynesian model of the *General Theory*, but particularly more classical approaches to the subject. For the first time in my studies at UBC I felt I was being exposed to something beyond the basics of the discipline. The second term was devoted to various macroeconomic models, with Samuelson's paper on the interaction of the multiplier and accelerator as a generator of macroeconomic fluctuations occupying part of the term. Mars had a marvellous hand held mechanical calculator that was operated with a crank. He would stand at the front of the class, triumphantly cranking away and grinding out result after result as he changed the parameters in the model. It was an experience. He did not press the frontiers of the discipline, but he exposed us to aspects of economic analysis that were completely absent from our other courses (and from what we would not have studied with Robert Clark). Mars' advanced statistics course was a thorough exploration of multivariate statistics and a befuddling discussion of sampling theory and techniques. In my career I have often called on the first part of the course, but never on the second. For all his dramatics and thundering complaints about Vancouver's "parish pump newspapers," Mars was a breath of fresh intellectual air -- but the breeze was temporary. He was only a one-

year visitor. I don't know how or if Tony interacted with him, but for me they had the same intellectually awakening effect.

That is my memory of the state of the Department of Economics when Tony arrived. It was a department devoted to teaching and the welfare of students, but on a deeper level, with the exception of the visiting professor, intellectually stagnant. The only research that was occurring was essentially parochial, although some of it, particularly the Indian project and some of Jamieson's work on industrial relations, had broader interest. That was possibly also true of Robert Clark's studies in municipal finance. Parochial research can be an important function of the only university in a province, but it is not the only function. Fostering a spirit of enquiry into a broad range of issues, practical and theoretical, rooted in a thorough understanding of the fundamentals of the discipline, is essential. That is what Tony brought to the department in 1953. Much has been said about his later administrative accomplishments. However, that misses the point. Tony was at best a mediocre administrator. His talent was to spin out ideas while getting others to do the administrative work, always to his own exacting standards. Perhaps that is the secret of a successful intellectual leader, which was always the role that Tony played so admirably.