

In memoriam

David J. Damas (1926-2010)

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David J. Damas

(1926-2010)

David Damas, professor emeritus in the Department of Anthropology, McMaster University, passed away in Burlington, Ontario, on April 14, 2010, following a brief illness. With his passing, Inuit studies and anthropology lost a true scholar, who believed every anthropologist should be a two-culture ethnologist.

David was born in Algoma, Wisconsin, where he completed high school as a National Merit Scholar and Eagle Scout. After a hitch in the United States Marine Corps, he earned a bachelor's degree in English at the University of Toledo (1950) and then chose to follow family tradition, working for seven years on Great Lakes ships during which he obtained his Master Mariner License and developed a lifelong love of sailing.

In 1957, David enrolled in the Department of Anthropology at the University of Chicago (1957-1962), earning his master's and doctoral degrees under Fred Eggan. During his residence there, he numbered among his classmates Ernest S. (Tiger) Burch, Jr., Nelson Graburn, and Lee Guemple. His dissertation, *Igluligmiut Kinship and Local Groupings: A Structural Approach*, based on a research year at Iglulik, was a seminal analysis of Inuit social organisation and was published by the National Museum of Canada (1963).

Upon receiving his Ph.D., David joined the National Museum of Canada (1962-1969), carrying out major projects among the Copper, Netsilik, and Iglulik Inuit, as well as serving for a year as the NMC's Acting Chief Ethnologist. During his tenure at the museum, he published widely on Inuit social organisation, family structure, and cultural ecology, and edited two major volumes on hunter-gatherers, *Ecological Essays* (1969a) and *Band Societies* (1969b) through the museum's publishing program.

David left the NMC in 1969 to join McMaster University's anthropology faculty (1969-1990) as an associate professor and, in 1973, was promoted to full professor. At McMaster, he actively published on the Inuit, including important comparative articles on Copper, Netsilik, and Iglulingmiut food sharing (1972) and kinship (1975) systems and edited Volume 5 of the *Handbook of North American Indians* (1984). Meanwhile, he chose to add another culture area to his ethnological repertoire, turning his mind and sailing skills to the South Pacific. Between 1975 and 1983, David made four major research trips to study the double descent and land tenure systems of Micronesian islanders, first on Pingelap Atoll and then through the East Caroline Islands. This

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research culminated in *Bountiful Island: A Study of Land Tenure on a Micronesian Atoll* (1994).

Although he retired from McMaster in 1990, his scholarship, particularly with respect to the Inuit, continued, albeit punctuated by trips to sail and golf. He especially devoted himself to understanding the process by which Canadian Inuit came to settle into the communities that are home to Nunavummiut today. Working from his own extensive field notes and Hudson's Bay Company, mission, and government records housed in the National Archives of Canada and at Prince of Wales Museum, Yellowknife, David produced his last major contribution on the Inuit. *Arctic Migrants, Arctic Villagers: The Transformation of Inuit Settlement in the Central Arctic* (2002) is a work that remains the most comprehensive study of the early "Government Era" to date.

David's interest in all things Inuit continued to the time of his death. We spoke and corresponded often about Nunavut and developments there, from the progress of the Qikiqtani Truth Commission to the effects of European decisions on matters vital to Inuit livelihood and culture. David passed away while I was in the field. I never had the opportunity to tell him that those Inuit friends who had read *Arctic Migrants, Arctic Villagers* felt that it was an important and honest portrait of their transition from the land to the settlements. I think he would have been gratified by their assessment. While not always the gentlest of critics, David brought rigor and insight to the study of Inuit culture and society that will be very much missed.

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