

Foreword Victor K. Prest (1913-2003)

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Volume 58, numéro 2-3, 2004

Glacial History, Paleogeography and Paleoenvironments in Glaciated
North America

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/013135ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/013135ar>

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Éditeur(s)

Les Presses de l'Université de Montréal

ISSN

0705-7199 (imprimé)

1492-143X (numérique)

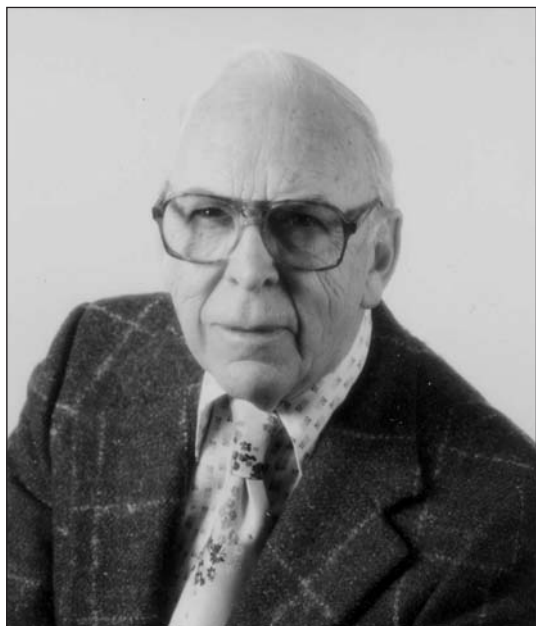
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Citer ce document

Wolfe, S. A., Plouffe, A., Clague, J., Fulton, B., Hodgson, D., McMartin, I.,
McClenaghan, B., St-Onge, D., Rampton, V. & Richard, P. J. (2004). Foreword
Victor K. Prest (1913-2003). *Géographie physique et Quaternaire*, 58(2-3),
159-159. <https://doi.org/10.7202/013135ar>

Foreword

VICTOR K. PREST (1913-2003)



Courtesy of Doug Hodgson (Geological Survey of Canada)

“... on September 26, 2003, Canada lost one of its most distinguished geologists and arguably its best-known and most influential Quaternary geologists...”; so begins the obituary of Dr. Victor K. Prest in *Quaternary Science Reviews* (Dyke *et al.*, 2004). That article provides an endearing recognition of a man, considered by many, as the builder of Quaternary geology in Canada. It is a significant challenge to prepare a foreword in dedication to Vic Prest without duplicating the numerous accolades and citations already noted, and perhaps not appropriate to try. Instead, we provide some additional insight into a Quaternary geologist admired and respected by several generations of colleagues, associates and students.

Most of today's Quaternary scientists in their forties and younger, will have had little direct contact with Vic. However his influence, through the *Glacial Map of Canada*, continues to be part of their research, and remains a major reference 40 years after publication. However, for any who spoke to Vic on the topic of their research, the story is similar; they recount Vic's ability to recall the details of an area mapped years ago, and to draw out scientific questions to challenge the young geologist. They also recall a down-to-earth, generous person who made time for everyone and took a personal interest in people he met. In short, a person who exemplified the term “mentor”.

To his immediate colleagues and successors, the reflections are similar. He was forever stimulating curiosity among others as he mused over the meaning of the data contributing to “The Map”. He

was the ultimate gatherer of information, and could continue conversations even with those who got diverted from the central themes of Quaternary geology. His continued friendship with all those who worked with him allowed him to continuously share and acquire scientific facts, and to bridge all generations.

For many scientists today, facing short timelines and constantly changing priorities, undertaking continental-scale compilations seems increasingly challenging. However, the syntheses of regional mapping compilations to a continental scale were, in fact, constructed from the contributions over time of many individuals. During the 1950's, Vic was the most senior Pleistocene geologist when surficial geology mapping became an established study at the Geological Survey of Canada, and a dozen PhDs were hired for regional studies. Vic's rigorous approach to his studies affected all of them through his acute interest to their observations and conclusions with respect to extent and timing of North American ice sheets. Vic fully understood the value of regional compilations, though this was certainly not unique to him; however, he had the priceless ability to carry syntheses to a continental scale.

Vic Prest was the first leader of the Quaternary group in the Geological Survey of Canada and was responsible for getting the fledgling organization off the ground. He took on responsibility for the research, compiling national maps and reports, and tracing advances and retreats of ice sheets. Arguably, however, the builder who constructed Canada's Quaternary organization was the late John Fyles, who diversified the application of Quaternary geology based data and kept the Quaternary group relevant and prominent in the Geological Survey.

Although the focus of the Quaternary sciences has changed in recent decades, the questions that remain to be answered come from the legacy left by researchers such as Vic Prest, who aided in a continental vision of the Quaternary period.

In the foreword to Vol. 59, n°s 2-3, we reflect, in part, on the history of Quaternary geology in Canada, on the change in focus since Vic's first Quaternary publication in 1949 and on what it has meant to many of us to be Quaternary scientists in Canada.

Stephen A. Wolfe and Alain Plouffe

with contributions from John Clague, Bob Fulton, Doug Hodgson, Isabelle McMartin, Beth McClenaghan, Denis St-Onge, Vern Rampton and Pierre J.H. Richard

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