

## Robert James (Bob) Morgan, 1938–2011



Image courtesy of Cape Breton University

Robert James (Bob) Morgan, former Director of the Beaton Institute Archives, Cape Breton University, passed away 4 June 2011. Bob will be 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. I had the pleasure of knowing Dr. Morgan my entire life first as a friend of the family, then as a professor, then a mentor, and finally as a colleague. In all Bob's involvements he brought a joyful enthusiasm and genuine respect for the opinions of others. He loved to conduct research and Bob 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 lecturer 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.

It was also during this period in Sydney that Bob became involved with a small but action-oriented group of individuals 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. The heritage movement in Cape Breton was born.

Bob would point out that at the time, there were no museums in Cape Breton, no historical societies, no "heritage" sector as we know it today. They were the Cape Breton pioneers in this field, learning how to establish and operate a historical society, how to raise funds to preserve threatened built heritage, and how to establish and run a community museum. Their success continues today as the Old Sydney Society is in its forty-fifth 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.

Bob, through his involvement as a founding and continuing member of the Old Sydney Society, held executive positions numerous times and continued to work toward a thriving heritage community in the area. He volunteered with the Sydney Steel Museum as well as the Lyceum Heritage Society, offered advice to forming societies, and advocated on behalf of archives and museums to municipal, provincial, and federal government departments as a means to enhance citizens' engagement with their communities. He believed that archives and museums were foundational to responsible citizenship; one must know the history of one's community – the struggles and the successes. Bob often noted that, while Sydney had borne the closing of the Sydney Steel Corporation's (SYSCO) plant, and Cape Breton the closing of the coal mines, the communities of industrial Cape Breton did not disappear. They were and are more than just the economies that drive them – they are the people, their stories, and their shared experiences.

In 1966 Bob, with his wife Babs, returned to Ottawa where he worked as an archivist at the Public Archives of Canada until 1968. Bob recalled he felt they were in Ottawa to stay; he loved archival work and felt secure as a public servant. However, his interest in the colonial period of Cape Breton history and the ready availability of primary source material at the Public Archives led Bob to undertake doctoral studies in History at the University of Ottawa in 1969, followed by a year in Montreal where he worked on his thesis and lectured at Loyola College (1970–1971). Bob received his PhD 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 (1971–1976), Bob helped to shape the interpretation of the largest historic reconstruction site in North America. Bob's keen interest in social history meant that 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, Bob Morgan's archival skills would be forefront in his career again. Following the tragic loss of Sr. Margaret Beaton in a car accident, College of Cape Breton (today Cape Breton University) Principal Fr. MacLellan, approached Bob to join the history faculty and become 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. As the first research Institute of CBU, the archives houses the second largest archival collection in Nova Scotia, and specializes in the historically significant documents of both Cape Breton Island and the University.

Bob's contribution was also felt nationally as he was a founding member of the National Archival Appraisal Board and in 1976 served as Vice-President. In

1979 Bob was the Atlantic Canada representative for the Archives Committee of SSHRCC. During his term, SSHRCC investigated the reform of the national archival system, which is documented in the 1980 publication *Canadian Archives* (more commonly known as the Wilson Report). The report called for a coordinated network of archives, the formation of the Canadian Council of Archives, and the establishment of an Extension Branch within the Public Archives of Canada. Bob used these experiences to inform his term as President of the Association of Canadian Archivists (1985–1986).

Bob was also an advocate of Nova Scotia's growing community archives and museum movement. In 1982 Bob chaired the first organizational meeting of what would become the Council of Nova Scotia Archives (CNSA). Bob was one of five archivists involved in the writing of the constitution and securing of funds to establish the Council. He then served as the CNSA's first president from 1983 to 1985. Bob remained active on the Executive Committee in the following years serving as Vice-President, the chair of the nominating committee, member-at-large, and finally as chair of the Future Development Committee. 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 at Xavier College Sydney and Loyola College Montreal, his research and interests became focused on local history. He helped pioneer the field now known as local/public history. Through his twenty-eight years as a member of the history faculty with Cape Breton University (CBU), he was instrumental in establishing the programs of Cape Breton Studies, Cultural Studies, and Museum Studies. Bob's dynamic personality in the classroom led to lively discussions over "tea" at the archives with faculty and students. His reputation as a teacher continued after his retirement as his courses through the CBU Senior's College were regularly oversubscribed.

In 1990 Bob was appointed Cape Breton University's first Dean of Research and Development. While in the position he leveraged federal funding with the research potential of the Beaton Institute's archival holdings to fund the construction of the Student, Culture, and Heritage Centre on the CBU campus. This modern facility now houses the archives, the Art Gallery, and the Centre for Cape Breton Studies including the state of the art digitization lab. The Centre is the cultural hub of the campus and serves the entire Cape Breton Regional Municipality and wider Island.

Bob's legacy to the public body of historical literature is perhaps the culmination of his excellence in the archive, museum, and classroom. Bob published four books focusing on the history of Cape Breton Island including the two-volume history entitled *Rise Again! The Story of Cape Breton Island* (2008 and 2009); *Perseverance: The Story of Cape Breton's University College 1952–2002* (2004); and *Early Cape Breton: From Founding to Famine* (2000). Bob also published broadly on the history of eighteenth-century Louisbourg, the

Loyalist founding and early history of Sydney, and the nineteenth-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*. His publications are indeed a lasting contribution to the scholarly fields of history, public history, and regional studies.

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 lookout 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 its living culture. While Bob was a "come from away" he adopted Cape Breton as his home; 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**