Obituary

Denis Martin Shaw, 1923–2003

Denis Shaw, formerly Executive Editor of *Geochimica et Cosmochimica Acta* (1971–1988) and an Associate Editor of *Meteoritics & Planetary Science* (1992–2003), died on October 6, 2003 after a career of outstanding scientific contributions to geochemistry, mineralogy, and petrology and a record of distinguished service to the earth sciences. A graduate of Cambridge University (MA, 1948) and the University of Chicago (Ph.D., 1951), he taught in the Department of Geology at McMaster University from 1949 to 1989, serving as Chair (1953–1959; 1962–1966) and Dean of Graduate Studies (1979–1984) and retiring in 1989 as Professor Emeritus. He was honored over his long career for the stature of his scientific research and his truly enormous service to science, especially geochemistry and mineralogy. Elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada in 1961, Denis was honored by the Society in 1981 as the recipient of their W. G. Miller Medal. In 1964, he served as President of the Mineralogical Association of Canada and was awarded the Association’s Past President Medal in 1984. More recently, in 1997, he was elected a Fellow of the Geochemical Society and the European Association of Geochemistry and was the recipient of the Distinguished Service Award of the Geochemical Society in 2002.

Among Denis’ major contributions to scholarship was his executive editorship of *Geochimica et Cosmochimica Acta*, widely regarded as the premier English-language publication in the field. His stewardship of the Acta coincided with a transition toward a more quantitative approach to geochemistry, and indeed, Denis was a leader in this effort. Never an easy job, as editorial opinion will occasionally collide with the monumental egos of some colleagues, Denis became editor when the discipline was struggling to move from a rather descriptive to a more quantitative science. Indeed, Denis himself was at the forefront of this transition. His fairness to contributors, whether a novice or a pillar in the field, his common sense logic, and his superb administrative skills were just a few of his many talents that guided the journal over his editorship and left a publication now regarded as the leader in its field. A good part of his professional life was involved in editing: *The handbook of geochemistry*, *Physics and chemistry of the Earth*, *Meteoritics*, and the *Comptes rendus of the French Academy of Sciences*.

While Denis’ contributions in the service of science were very significant, there can be no doubt that his scientific stature as a geochemist was immense, not just in Canada, but internationally. Over a career of more than 50 years and some 130 scientific publications (excluding book reviews and abstracts), of which he was sole author of almost half, his expertise was demonstrated in analytical methodology, statistical applications, numerical modeling, trace element geochemistry, and mineralogy. His early work saw significant studies in the mineralogy and geochemistry of scapolite and work on various radioactive minerals, especially in Quebec. He contributed to a range of analytical methodologies varying from the DC Arc Spectrograph to Prompt Gamma Neutron Activation Analysis and Alpha Track Imaging. He was recognized as an authority on the geochemistry of various elements, especially boron and lithium, where his applications extended from terrestrial to lunar, planetary, and meteorite domains. Some of his most significant and probably enduring work was in the area of numerical modeling and its application to problems of magma genesis and evolution. He published a landmark paper in this area in 1970 (*Trace element fractionation during anatexis. Geochimica et Cosmochimica Acta* 34:237–242), which demonstrated the great potential of numerical modeling to constrain problems in petrogenesis. It is a testimonial to his recognition of...
promising ideas and his ability to persuade others of their significance. Several additional papers appeared subsequently, and in 2003, he completed a manuscript for a book dealing with the applications of numerical modeling to petrology.

Denis was inclined toward the theoretical. Various of his papers addressed or commented on theoretical concepts of the day (the camouflage principal, distribution laws in geochemistry, dynamic melting theory, etc). He was, however, no stranger to the field, especially if the field meant the Grenville province. He was, in addition, a participant in some of the major earth science projects undertaken by Canada, including Lithoprobe and Canadian participation in the Deep Sea Drilling Project. His approach to earth science was straightforward. He summed it up as follows: “keep rocks firmly in mind, remembering that minerals are the archives of rocks, and do not forget to keep filing your fingernails while waving your arms” (translation—narrow your research to problems that can contribute results of broad significance).

Beyond the professional sphere, Denis’ interests were in the arts, music (he owned a baby grand and took lessons again after “retirement”), the history of science, racquet sports, and foreign cars (owner at one time or another of a Citroen, an Audi, a Saab, and recently, a Toyota hybrid).

Denis Shaw’s generous commitment of his time and abilities to the promotion of science and, especially, his example to students of the vital character of curiosity-motivated research will be greatly missed. But, his achievements in the world of ideas are enduring, and his influence on the thinking of the many students he supervised will not fade quickly.

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