



Harold Rocke Robertson
C.C., FRCS (Edin), FRCS (Can), FACS
1912-1998

UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA
LIBRARY

H. ROCKE ROBERTSON COLLECTION OF DICTIONARIES AND RELATED WORKS

Dr. Robertson donated his large collection of dictionaries and related works to UBC in 1989. This document provides some information on Dr. Robertson and the collection.

H. Roche Robertson

Harold Roche Robertson was born in Victoria on August 4, 1912, and died in Ottawa on February 8, 1998. He married Beatrice Roslyn Arnold of Montreal, and they had four children.

From his earliest days he wanted to be a doctor. After completing school at Brentwood College on Vancouver Island, he went to McGill University in Montreal where he studied science as an undergraduate, and then medicine. He stood first in his class of 1935 and 1936. His focus was general surgery. He did his post-doctoral work as an intern at the Montreal General Hospital, and then qualified as a Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons in Edinburgh.

In World War II he was Commander of the Second Canadian Field Surgical Unit in the allied invasion of Sicily and Italy.

On return to Canada in 1944, Colonel Robertson was posted to the Vancouver Military Hospital. Upon his discharge from the army on the cessation of hostilities, he was appointed Chairman of the Department of Surgery at Shaughnessy Hospital. He qualified as a Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons of Canada in 1945.

In 1948 Dr. Robertson was one of the prime organizers of the new University of British Columbia Medical School, and the first Chairman of its Department of Surgery. He served as Acting Dean of the medical school over two or three periods of time. He was also Chief of Surgery at the Vancouver General Hospital, and he maintained an active surgical practice, with a growing reputation as one of Canada's leading general surgeons.

In 1959 Dr. Robertson moved with his family to Montreal so that he could take up two appointments - Surgeon-in-Chief of the Montreal General Hospital, and Chairman of the Department of Surgery at McGill University. His tenure in these positions saw a continuation of his recognized work in diagnosis, surgical practice and teaching. He was now widely recognized as one of Canada's top general surgeons, and a last resort for many advanced cancer cases from across Canada.

His appointment as McGill's 11th Principal and Vice Chancellor in 1962 thrust Dr. Robertson into the national non-medical spotlight. The Globe & Mail reported that at "*the height of the Quiet Revolution, he championed English-language rights when he fought provincial funding cuts to McGill – a battle that ensured McGill's survival...*"

In December 1969 Doctor Robertson was honoured with the award of Companion of the Order of Canada, our country's highest honour. He retired in 1970, and continued an active life of academic study and advisory work until 1990. He was elected a member of the Royal Society of Canada.

During his career, he developed an interest in lexicography, and was a collector of English dictionaries, glossaries and related works in other languages.

The Collection

In 1989 Dr. Robertson gave most of his library collection to the University of British Columbia. He was greatly attracted to the interest shown by UBC in maintaining the collection and encouraging access to it by students and staff. At the same time the UBC Press published an annotated catalogue of the collection, which was prepared by Dr. Robertson and his grandson Wesley Robertson.

The collection includes over 350 dictionaries and encyclopaedias. It spans the entire history of the English dictionary:

- from the Renaissance through the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries of modest development;
- through the majestic efforts of Nathaniel Bailey and Samuel Johnson in the eighteenth century that created the standards for all dictionaries to follow;
- through the spectacular works of Noah Webster and others in the nineteenth century which improved upon the past efforts, brought the language through the industrial revolution, and recognized the evolution of the English language in the United States; and
- through to the highest achievement to date, the Oxford English Dictionary of the twentieth century.

The collection also includes the classic dictionaries of the French and Italian languages.

The only major work of his collection that did not go to UBC was the 38 volume *L'Encyclopaedie* by Diderot and D'Alembert of 1755. That work now sits in the H. Locke Robertson Room in the Osler Library at McGill University.

Contact for this collection is Mr. Ralph Stanton, Special Collections Librarian, Main Library, 1956 Main Mall, Vancouver, BC V6T 1Z1. Tel 604-822-4879; Fax 604-822-9587; E-mail rstanton@interchange.ubc.ca.