

Profiles in History: Nova Scotia Association Honours Dr. John Mulrooney



N.S.O.A. President, Dr. Ron Haines (l.) presents painting to Dr. John Mulrooney.



Mrs. Georgina Haines (l.) presents roses to Mrs. Stevie Mulrooney.

"In the field of optometry in Nova Scotia, one man stands out above others. His life is one we would do well to emulate."

With these words, Dr. Ron Haines, President of the Nova Scotia Association of Optometrists opened the tribute to Dr. John Mulrooney of Chester, held at the Nova Scotian Hotel in Halifax on November 6, 1982.

At the banquet, Dr. Mulrooney received the association's first Eminent Service Award in the form of a painting by Dartmouth artist Wayne Lovett. Dr. Haines described Dr. Mulrooney's long service to the provincial and national association.

"He was a pioneer, a real doer in our association — a latter day father, or perhaps I should say, a godfather, always willing to help others," said Dr. Haines.

Born in 1916, Dr. Mulrooney graduated from the Ontario College of Optometry in 1935. He served as Secretary Treasurer of the Board of Examiners from 1940 to 1961, and as the association's Secretary Treasurer from 1961 to 1973. He became provincial representative to CAO in 1947, becoming Vice-President in 1951, and President in the following year. He served as Treasurer of CAO from 1955 to 1963. When CAO instituted the President's Award in 1965, the unanimous choice for the first recipient was John Mulrooney.

Dr. Harold Coape-Arnold, John's classmate at COO wrote;

"It was a herculean task to keep the association in the black and to lay the foundations which permitted the association to survive despite very limited funding. John's greatest trait was an ability to get along with other people, to smooth troubled waters, and to prevent mavericks like myself, Don Francis and Manny Finkleman from going overboard. . . . Don, Manny and I served as Presidents after John, and it could be said that he educated us in the presidency."

In presenting the Eminent Service Award, Dr. Haines stated that it was a "token of our respect and appreciation." Then Dr. Don MacArthur read greetings from some of John's many friends. Mayor Ron Wallace, a member of the association, was unable to attend the meeting because of illness. He sent a letter of appreciation, a book, and a Special Certificate from the City of Halifax, recognizing Dr. Mulrooney's outstanding community service. Dr. Ralph Rosere read greetings from the immediate Past-President of CAO, Dr. Reid MacDuff, commending Dr. Mulrooney on serving the profession and

his patients, and a message from CAO President Dr. Roland des Groseilliers expressing appreciation for John's "many years of dedication." Dr. Rosere added; "When I became Secretary-Treasurer, John's advice was always there when I needed it."

In responding, Dr. Mulrooney, in his smiling, modest way, expressed his amazement at hearing what he'd accomplished.

"We had a terrific association, and a terrific group of fellows," he said, referring to the early days of both the provincial and national associations. "We had to learn what we wanted and how to get it. We knew we had to professionalize or die."

He recalled "our MSI days, and the sincere, hardworking group that brought optometry under it in 1973." Expressing his happiness at seeing his old friends and so many new members, he ended his short speech by stating that "any benefits I got came from the efforts of others."

In presenting flowers to Mrs. Stevie Mulrooney, Mrs. Georgina Haines touched on another dimension of John's life, speaking simply and from the heart. She spoke of Stevie's "humility and pride", and of her role as co-worker and inspiration to John. She listed the number of tasks that Stevie had undertaken in helping John to advance the profession and the association, and spoke of her "special charm that has inspired us all." Then she presented the flowers with "deep gratitude and love."

Words cannot capture the feeling of warmth and affection that suffused this event. During the day, Dr. G. N. Getman, an optometrist who is an authority of learning disabilities, had challenged younger members to meet people at their point of need. At a conference on learning disabilities in Halifax on the previous day, he said, key speakers had said; "If your kid's are having trouble in school — see an optometrist." He added; "Optometry is a profession that looks at people as individuals."

Dr. Mulrooney's career shows that optometric associations grow through the dedicated work of individuals who care for their peers and their patients. In honouring Dr. John Mulrooney, the Nova Scotia association recognized the leadership style of this remarkable man — that of getting ordinary people to do extraordinary things.

Jim Lotz, Executive Director
N.S.A.O.