

Jacques Rousseau

(1905-1970)

The death of Dr. Jacques Rousseau on 4 August 1970 marks the end of an era, at least in French Canada. Scientists of such brilliant eclecticism are few and getting fewer every day.

Jacques Rousseau was born on 5 October 1905, in Saint-Lambert near Montreal, the third of fourteen children of a pioneer electrical engineer, and the grandson of a medical doctor and of a professor of medicine at the University of Montreal. He studied in Saint-Lambert, Montreal, Sainte-Thérèse and, after his family moved to Montmagny, in La Pocatière. Health problems plagued him in his youth and he had to complete his college studies under private teachers. He obtained a classical B.A. from the University of Montreal in 1926. He had already begun to attend Brother Marie-Victorin's lectures at the University's Botanical Institute in 1923, and enrolled as full-time student in 1926, working part-time as laboratory demonstrator. He obtained his *Licence ès Sciences* in 1928 and joined the staff as Assistant Professor, teaching genetics, paleobotany and economic botany. He studied at Cornell in the summers of 1931 and 1933, and at the University of New Mexico in the summer of 1932; he also studied for short periods at the University of Vermont and at Harvard. He completed his D.Sc. in 1934, with a remarkable thesis on the genus *Astragalus* in Quebec, and became *professeur agrégé* in 1935. He taught at the Institute until 1944. When Brother Marie-Victorin's dream of the Montreal Botanical Gardens became a reality in 1938, Dr. Rousseau was appointed Assistant-Director. After the Brother's tragic death in 1944, Dr. Rousseau succeeded him as Director, a post he held until 1956.

During those years, he was invited to teach in many institutions, notably Laval in 1949, 1952 and 1957, Port-au-Prince (Haiti) in 1944, Institut Français de l'Amérique Latine in Mexico City in 1945, the McGill Geography Summer School in 1952 and 1953, and the Sorbonne in Paris in 1950.

In 1957, he became Director of the Human History Branch of the National Museum in Ottawa; he held that post until February 1959. In October of that year, he was again invited to the Sorbonne and to the *Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes*, where he lectured until 1962. He then joined the new *Centre d'Etudes Nordiques* at Laval as Re-

search Director and Professor of Ethnobiology; those years saw his health decline — he suffered from arthritis and limped badly at times — but he refused to slow down and died working.

Dr. Rousseau's reputation as an indefatigable field worker is based on his remarkable activities during the summers of some twenty-five consecutive years. He worked in the Lower St. Lawrence and Gaspé Peninsula in the twenties and thirties, crossing the Peninsula on foot in 1931, and giving valuable experience to a large number of field assistants. He worked on the North Shore, in Nova Scotia, and in the Magdalen Islands. In 1942, he crossed Anticosti on foot twice. During the summers of 1944 to 1947, and the winter of 1948 he worked at Lake Mistassini. In 1947, he travelled by canoe down the George River to Ungava Bay. In 1948, he canoed up the Kogaluk and down the Arnaud rivers, via Payne Lake, leading the first group of white men in this particular area. In 1949, with botanist René Pomerleau, he explored the Otish Mountains; it was on this trip that he suffered the first of a series of heart attacks that were to stop him . . . twenty-one years later. In 1951, he explored Adloylik (Abluviak) Fjord on Ungava Bay, the Korok river and a part of the Torngat Mountains; he also flew to the New Quebec Crater (Chubb Crater). In the summer of 1965, he participated in an archaeological investigation of the Michéa site at Payne Lake: this was his last long field trip.

Dr. Rousseau was active in a surprisingly large number of scientific organizations. From 1930 to 1946, he was Secretary General of the *Association canadienne-française pour l'Avancement des Sciences* (ACFAS), and nursed the then infant organism into the powerful scientific body we know today: he was the main organizer of the 1933 ACFAS congress, the first of the annual meetings of the Association. Beginning in 1923, he was active in more than 70 different scientific associations, in the fields of botany, geography, history, linguistics, anthropology, folklore and human genetics (on which he wrote a book). He was also a driving force in various committees within the University and society in general. He became a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada in 1942. He was a charter member of the Arctic Institute of North America and was appointed a Fellow the same year, 1948; he was on the Board of Governors from 1955 to 1957. He was the first to launch the idea of hosting an International Botanical Congress in Montreal: the project began in Stockholm in 1950, but was to succeed only in 1959. Dr. Rousseau was

awarded a large number of medals and prizes.

He was a prolific author. His *curriculum vitae* and bibliography is a mimeographed document of over 85 pages, listing 550 texts, plus over 100 abstracts of papers he read at different scientific meetings. He was not above vulgarizing his works and publishing them in simplified form in newspapers and magazines, a reflection of his 25-year association with the *Cercles des Jeunes Naturalistes* and their founder Marie-Victorin. His works are proof of his manifold interests in the fields related to botany and ethnology. In the thirties, he was the most important of Marie-Victorin's collaborators in editing the monumental *Flore laurentienne*, writing the general identification key and three of the chapters. In his more than 40 years of activity, he described 130 botanical species, varieties or forms, and 8 botanical entities were named after him. From 1945 on, a large portion of his writings were concerned with Northern Quebec ethnobiology. He originated the concept of the Hemiartic Zone, between the Subarctic and the Arctic, characterized by a mixture of tundra and boreal forest areas. Two biogeographical papers he published, one in Paris and one at Laval, are commonly used as university textbooks. When death stopped him, he was completing a critical edition of the original manuscript of Pehr Kalm's travels in Canada; this will be published soon. He was also supervising the preparation of an index to Roland's *Flore populaire*, a work that entailed the writing and filing of over 100,000 index cards.

In most aspects of his activity, Dr. Rousseau was a genuine *force de la nature*, as his field work amply proves. He was a true gentleman, whose nobility was inbred and of the sort that does not come with family titles. He was uncompromisingly honest, brutally so at times, and had little patience with the civil service barons and the eight-to-five desk heroes. He was the first to admit that the difficulties that led to his leaving Montreal

in 1956 and Ottawa in 1959 had to do with this aspect of his personality. He easily convinced any listener that a complete, unabridged history of his "dismissal" from the National Museum would at least make entertaining reading in the absurd *genre*. But he was never bitter, considering that he had learned a lot from such experiences and that the balance was positive in the end.

He was a great writer, whose training in the humanities spared his readers of the now so popular "scientese" jargon. His specializing in plant nomenclature and taxonomy corresponded with his interest in language, both spoken and written; many a degree-clad linguist could still learn from him in the practical aspects of language. He was a great writer because he was also a great talker, whose conversation was always up-to-date on anything from *haute cuisine* — he was a gourmet of international stature — to peace in Vietnam, about which he personally took a stand both in talks and in writing. His mental attitude was essentially young, recoiling instinctively away from prejudice of any kind and ready-made, fashionable opinions, which explains his great popularity among the students. During his Paris and Laval years, he in fact became a sort of patriarch, with a following from all corners of society and opinion. Laval students had elected him "dean" of the men's residence where he was staying. There are few persons in the university world today who could claim to have had such a permanent — and quiet — influence in the student world. He believed in God and was a devout Catholic, which in our days is another way of being a non-conformist.

Dr. Rousseau is survived by his wife, Madeleine Aquin-Rousseau, who was associated with many of his works notably in Mistassini, and by a daughter and two sons.

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