

ALBERT LINCOLN WASHBURN (1911–2007)

Professor Albert Lincoln Washburn, the first executive director of the Arctic Institute of North America (from 1945 to 1950), died in Seattle on January 30, 2007, at the age of 95. “Link,” as his friends knew him, loved the Arctic. He dedicated his life to fieldwork and to intensive study of the Arctic and the polar regions in general, focusing on glacial and periglacial environments and Quaternary history of the earth. All of his research had the common thread of understanding periglacial processes. In addition to an active career in the field, he did an exceptional amount of administrative work.

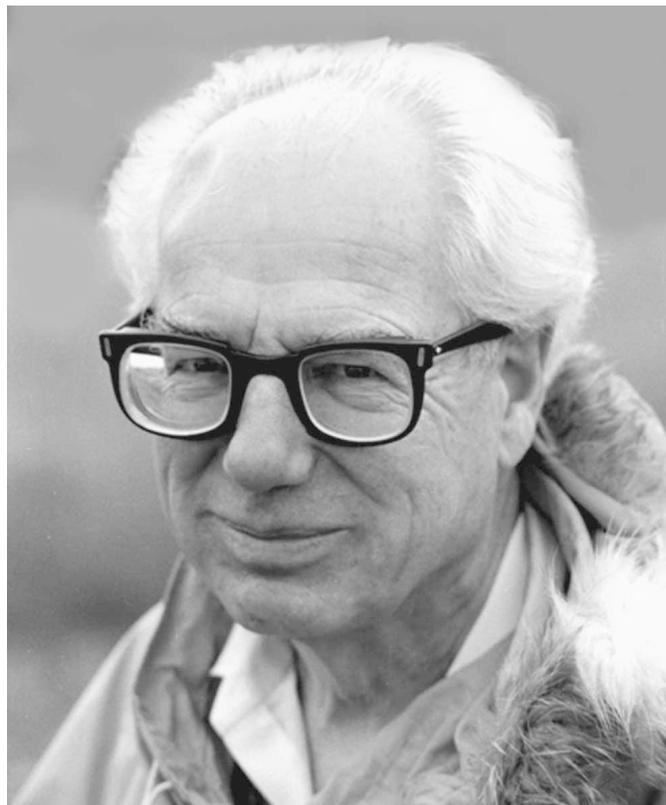
Link spent eight years of his childhood in Austria, where his father was in charge of the U.S. Legation from 1922 to 1929. For Link, this meant becoming a fluent speaker of German and an excellent skier. Both the language and skiing were of value in his future. He was one of the few American scientists to present papers orally in German at international meetings. He joined the ski team at Dartmouth College, where he majored in geology. Link’s love of mountains led him to join the Harvard-Dartmouth expedition to Mt. Crillon in Alaska’s Glacier Bay in 1934.

The year 1935 was an eventful one for Link. He placed fifth in the national downhill and slalom championships at Mt. Rainier, Washington, and graduated from Dartmouth with an AB in Geology. But the most important and long-lasting event of 1935 was his marriage to Tahoe Talbot.

Link’s skiing prowess qualified him for the 1936 Winter Olympics at Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Germany, where he skied in both the slalom and two-mile alpine events. In 1936, he also participated in the National Geographic expedition to Mt. McKinley. His first taste of the Arctic came in 1937, when he and Richard F. Flint were the geologists on Louise A. Boyd’s expedition to the fjord regions of East Greenland. The stunning beauty and grandeur of East Greenland did their magic. Link was “hooked” on the Arctic.

Link and Tahoe carried out fieldwork on Victoria Island, Northwest Territories, during July and August of 1938 and 1939, and from April 1940 to February 1941. This field study became Link’s PhD dissertation at Yale University under the direction of Richard Flint. World War II delayed publication of the work until 1947, when it appeared as Memoir 22 of the Geological Society of America.

During the war, Link served as an intelligence officer in the Arctic, Desert, Tropic Information Center (ADTIC) of the U.S. Army Air Forces. This service contributed, indirectly, to the origin of AINA and Link’s role in it. Dr. Laurence M. Gould, Chief of the Arctic Section of ADTIC, was in frequent contact with Canadian colleagues, and it was clear that Canada and the United States faced many common problems. Gould was a key participant, with Washburn, among others, in two planning meetings during 1944 that led to the joint Canada-U.S. establishment of AINA, as a binational organization dedicated to the



Albert Lincoln Washburn (Photo: Stephen C. Porter).

advancement of knowledge about the Arctic. It was decided to base the Institute in Canada, with headquarters in Montreal. Gould served as acting director until Washburn was released from the military and became the first full-time director in 1945.

These events were recorded in Raleigh Parkin’s (1966) account of the early history of AINA. Shortly after Link resigned in 1951, Max Dunbar (1952:3) paid tribute to Lincoln Washburn as the first director:

The decision of the Board of Governors of the Institute, in early 1945, to ask Lincoln Washburn to take on the Executive Directorship, proved a wise and a happy one. Dr. Washburn...came to Montreal in the same year and set up office in the Institute headquarters.... He left Montreal in March 1951 to establish the Washington Office....

The Institute is very greatly indebted to Dr. Washburn; it was he, more than anyone else, who set the pattern of its early development. His great devotion to his work, his gift for detail and his thoroughness have constantly amazed his associates, and it is to these qualities of his that the sound foundation of the organization can surely be ascribed. His work for the Institute did not appear to cease day or night, as witness the many guests on social occasions in his home who found themselves suddenly involved in impromptu committee meetings in the corner. Much of the financial endowment which started the work of the

Institute, and which still carries it on, was due to Dr. Washburn's energy and enterprise.

His tact and modesty gained him firm friends in both capitals....

No appreciation of the work of Dr. Washburn, in Institute matters, could omit warm and special tributes to his wife. Tahoe Washburn was an important member of the team; her charm, cheerfulness, verve and warmth will never be forgotten in Montreal. She accompanied her husband on several of his northern expeditions, and she became known to many as the hostess of the Washburn home on Westmount Mountain, which came to be a natural Mecca for arctic people going through the city; a sort of unofficial hostelry of infinite hospitality.

Dunbar's appreciation of Tahoe is important. Link and Tahoe were a unique team for 71 years, in the field, in the office, and at home. Tahoe Lake (70° N; 108°30' W) and Washburn Lake (70°05' N; 107°30' W) are on the Victoria Island map, and "Camp Tahoe" marks the sites of Washburn's activities at Resolute Bay on Cornwallis Island and near Mesters Vig in the King Oscar Fjord region of East Greenland. Tahoe published an account of their life among the Inuit from her journals written during their fieldwork on Victoria Island from 1938 to 1941. Her book (Washburn, 1999) is good companion reading to Link's GSA Memoir 22 and is also a valuable history of changing times in the Arctic, from traditional life and transportation to the modern use of radio and aircraft.

Link went on to become director of the U.S. Army Snow, Ice, and Permafrost Research Establishment (SIPRE), which in 1961 became the Cold Regions Research and Engineering Laboratory (CRREL). As SIPRE director, Link worked with chief scientist Henri Bader to write a major plan for support of basic research on all aspects of snow, ice, and frozen ground, as well as a comprehensive plan for field studies that extended across the North American Arctic from Greenland to Alaska. The plan included the Central Sierra Snow Laboratory and a field station in Houghton, Michigan. While director, Link was instrumental in bringing Dr. Ukichiro Nakaya, followed by Dr. Akira Higashi, from Hokkaido University (Sapporo, Japan) as visiting scientists. He moved from SIPRE to join the faculty of Dartmouth College in 1953; in 1960, he moved to Yale and became Director of Graduate Studies in the Department of Geology.

Link continued his own fieldwork near Mesters Vig in the King Oscar Fjord region of East Greenland, which he had first visited during the Louise Boyd expedition in 1937. He made a reconnaissance study in the summer of 1955, established instrumented sites in 1957, and made observations each year from 1957 through 1961, and again in 1964. His fieldwork on Cornwallis Island, Arctic Canada, in what is now Nunavut Territory, extended from 1981 to 1995. He conducted research in Antarctica in 1957 and 1958 and was involved in planning the multinational Dry Valley Drilling Project in 1972–75.

Link joined the University of Washington's Geology faculty in 1967. He encouraged the university administration to establish the Quaternary Research Center (QRC) to take advantage of the large interdisciplinary group of faculty involved with many aspects of Quaternary research. Link put together an outstanding proposal for National Science Foundation (NSF) support to build the QRC. As stated in Stephen C. Porter's obituary of Washburn (2007:312):

It was the first such university group in this country [the United States] specifically organized to promote interdisciplinary research on Quaternary problems. An integral part of the QRC is its Periglacial Laboratory, which Link designed for experimental investigations of frozen ground.

Sensing the need for a scientific journal devoted to Quaternary studies, Washburn obtained an NSF grant to help establish *Quaternary Research*, the first issue of which appeared in 1970. He shepherded the journal through its first 5 years, establishing for it a reputation for breadth and excellence and making it one of the most widely cited earth science publications.

Thus, Washburn was deeply involved in establishing two journals: *Arctic*, first published in 1948, and *Quaternary Research*, published since 1970. His own bibliography of more than 60 titles spans the time from 1939 to 1999. His last major publication in 1997, Memoir 190 of the Geological Society of America, was about patterned ground on Cornwallis Island in Arctic Canada, as was his GSA Memoir 22 about Victoria Island in Arctic Canada 50 years earlier. Tahoe was the field assistant and companion in both studies. All of Washburn's papers are in the Rauner Special Collections Library at Dartmouth College.

Link was honored nationally and internationally and served as an officer in many national and international committees and organizations. Most notably, he was Chairman of the Polar Research Board of the U.S. National Academy of Sciences. A listing of other chairmanships and presidencies is in Porter (2007). He was an honorary member of AINA, the International Glaciological Society, and the International Union for Quaternary Research. He received the Kirk Bryan Award of the Geological Society of America (1971), the André H. Dumont Medal of the Geological Society of Belgium (1975), an Honorary Doctorate from the University of Alaska (1981), and the Vega Medal of the Swedish Academy for Anthropology and Geography (1997).

The many facets of Link's career included scholarship, research, administration, and careful, detailed planning, as well as his mentoring role, his generosity, and his friendship to many people. He was my boss in the early 1950s and a friend for more than half a century.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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*Carl S. Benson
Geophysical Institute
University of Alaska Fairbanks
903 Koyukuk Drive
Fairbanks, Alaska, USA
99775-7320
benson@gi.alaska.edu*