

## **A Brief Academic Biography of John H. Munro**

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### **MUSIC, THE MUSE (CLIO), AND ME <sup>1</sup>**

*Music produces a kind of pleasure that human nature cannot do without.*

*If you would know if a people were well governed, and its laws are good or bad, examine the music that it practises.*

Attributed to Confucius (551 BCE - 479 BCE). Latin version of his actual name: Kong Fu-Zi

#### **My education and academic career:**

I was born in Vancouver, British Columbia (B.C.), Canada, in 1938. Apart from three years in Ottawa, at and after the end of World War II (1944 - 47), I had all my subsequent education – primary and secondary school, and undergraduate university education – in Vancouver. I graduated from Magee High School in 1956 (in Kerrisdale), and then entered the University of British Columbia (UBC). Four years later, in June 1960, I graduated with a B.A. degree: First Class Combined Honours in Economics and History. I also won a Woodrow Wilson Graduate Fellowship and admission into Yale University's Ph.D. programme in History. Yale had been my first choice for graduate school, because I wanted to work with Professor Roberto S. Lopez, who indeed became my dissertation director. I received my M.A. degree from Yale in June 1961. After two years of course work (including the MA year), and the Ph.D. comprehensive examinations (May 1962), I spent a full year (1963) in Brussels, Belgium, doing research in the Algemeen Rijksarchief. In August 1964, I completed my doctoral dissertation (begun in Brussels): *Bullionism in Anglo-Burgundian Commercial Relations, 1384-1478*. My Ph.D. degree, however, was obviously not formally conferred until the following annual convocation at Yale, in June 1965 (which I did not attend).

In September 1964, having declined an offer from the University of Pittsburgh (despite a higher rank and higher salary), I returned to Vancouver and UBC, with a joint appointment in the Departments of History and Economics, to teach both medieval and modern European economic history: initially as an Instructor and then (from 1965) as Assistant Professor. I have taught virtually nothing else over the next 44 years; and I have taught only in Canadian universities (the two listed here).

In 1968, I accepted an offer as Associate Professor in Economics at the University of Toronto (in the then Department of Political Economy), where I still teach.<sup>2</sup> I received tenure in July 1970. I became a Full

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<sup>1</sup> From Answers.com: 'In Greek mythology, Clio (Greek: Κλειώ, pronounced /'klaɪoʊ/ in English) or Kleio is the muse of history. Like all the muses, she is a daughter of Zeus and Mnemosyne.'

<sup>2</sup> In 1982, the Department of Political Economy, founded in 1888, was split into three: the Department of Economics, the Department of Political Science, and the Commerce and Finance Programme (now effectively part of the Joseph L. Rotman School of Management). See Ian M. Drummond, *Political Economy at the University of Toronto : a History of the Department, 1888-1982* (Toronto: Faculty of Arts

Professor of Economics in July 1973. I must here note that, so far as I know, I am one of only two post-World War II professors in this department whose Ph.D. degree is not in Economics, but in History.<sup>3</sup> No one with such a status would be hired today in our department; and my dubious status has not left me with any complete sense of security, I must admit. Just the same, I must also emphasize that, in my now over forty years in this department, I have always been treated remarkably well, with support and courtesy from all colleagues. I do feel that I have been far better off serving in an Economics Department than in a History Department: not just because my salaries have been higher, but because Economics departments tend to be more harmonious than History departments, and above all, because I have learned so much from my Economics colleagues, over these past forty years. I can never underestimate my tremendous good fortune in serving in this department, which I note with some pride, has (until recently) been ranked **no. one** in Canada, for its publications and working papers, by REPEC [Research Papers in Economics].<sup>4</sup>

At the University of Toronto, I have received several research fellowships: various Canada Council Fellowships, five consecutive Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council Fellowships, and two Connaught Senior Research Fellowships, most of which helped finance five annual sabbatical leaves, and 23 trips to Belgian, Dutch, and British archives.

In 2000, in recognition of my scholarly contributions to the economic history of the late-medieval Low Countries – or so I understand, I was elected a Foreign Member of the Koninklijke Vlaamse Academie van België voor Wetenschappen en Kunsten [Royal Flemish Academy of Belgium for Science and the Arts]. As a ‘prophet without honour in his own country’, I am not – I hasten to add – a member of the Royal Society of Canada!

The previous year, in 1999, I was also elected to the Comitato Scientifico [Scientific Committee], of the Istituto Internazionale di Storia Economica ‘Francesco Datini da Prato’, Italy. In 2003, I was re-elected and then appointed to the Institute’s Giunta (Executive Committee). In 2004-2005, I organized the 2006 annual Datini conference on ‘Europe’s Economic Relations with the Islamic World, 13<sup>th</sup> - 18<sup>th</sup> centuries’. In April 2009, I was relieved of these two obligations, as required by the Institute’s charter, at the age of 70 (though in fact I was already 71 years old). I was then, however, ‘elevated’ to the Datini Institute’s Comitato d’Onore [Committee of Honour], which will still entitle me to continue attending the annual conferences for the rest of my active life (while the Institute will continue to pay for my travel and hotel expenses).

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and Sciences, 1983).

<sup>3</sup> The other was the eminent scholar and good friend who brought me here, in 1968: Professor Karl Helleiner (1902-1984) who received his Ph.D., also in History, from the University of Vienna, in 1927. His son Gerald Helleiner also taught here as a Professor of Economics, and is now retired.

<sup>4</sup> In January 2009, after long ranking no. one, we slipped to no. two, after the University of B.C. See <http://ideas.repec.org/top/top.canada.html>. See also: <http://ideas.repec.org/top/top.inst.all.html>. In a weighted ranking of university Economics departments and university- and government-related economic institutions (‘think tanks’) for the entire world, our department ranks no. 49; and the next best in Canada, Queen’s University, ranks no. 69; and the University of B.C., ranks no. 71, as of July-August 2008. For another comparison, the Faculty of Economics at Cambridge University ranks no. 64. Not too surprisingly the top rank of no. one is held by the National Bureau of Economic Research, in Cambridge, Massachusetts (with many of its members from Harvard, which ranks no. 4 on this list, and the first university, as such, on this list). So: if the rankings included only university Economics departments, we and the others would rank higher; and another study published in 2003 (based on data for 1995-1999) ranked our department as no. 23 in a world-wide comparison of university economics departments (Harvard was and is, of course, no. one).

## How did I become an economic historian of the later-medieval Low Countries?

This is surely an obvious question: because there are not that many North Americans who specialise in this area, even if it was the predominant economic region of northern Europe until the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Most of the now few medieval economic historians in North America specialise, however, in either England or Italy.

The answer lies in music. I discovered ‘classical’ music entirely outside the home, at age 13, in 1951: partly from the school system (I was required to take a course in musical appreciation), and partly from the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC), which was then vastly different from and vastly superior to its current form. Having also, at that age, acquired a job delivering newspapers, I was soon spending most of my earnings on classical music recordings. In 1956, the CBC offered a year-long series of Sunday-night programmes, entitled *Music and Western Man*, produced by Peter Garvie, who subsequently published a book of the radio scripts.<sup>5</sup> A number of very eminent musicologists, music critics, and composers provided, for each programme, an hour long musically-illustrated commentary on the history of western music, from the beginnings of polyphony, in twelfth-century Notre Dame (Paris) to the present, i.e., the mid twentieth century.<sup>6</sup> That was followed by an hour of more recordings – remarkable, given the small supply of such recordings in that era. While having by this time assembled a large collection of classical recordings (LP records), I had none from before the time of Bach. What made this series of programmes an absolute turning point in my life was the discovery of so-much pre-Bach music: especially that of the late-medieval Low Countries. I also discovered the wealth of paintings – and the fifteenth-century Flemish masters are still my favourites – and architecture.

Then I soon found that this was the wealthiest and most economically advanced zone in late-medieval northern Europe, rivalling Italy in its economy and culture. Thus, I began to study this region’s economic history – while also building up a larger and larger library of recordings of the music of this late-medieval, and early modern, region.

In the summer of 1959, I was awarded a place on the World University Service Committee of Canada’s annual summer seminar, held that year in the Caribbean. From that trip I came back with a suitcase of government documents that enabled me to write the required BA Honours thesis for my degree, and I soon realized that what I wanted was an academic and not the business career for which I had seemed to be groomed: in financial institutions (i.e., stocks and bonds).<sup>7</sup> My B.A. thesis supervisor (Prof. Robert Will) then nominated me for a Woodrow Wilson Fellowship, which, as noted above, took me to Yale University, where I acquired my PhD in 1964 (de facto; de jure in 1965).

## My retirement, festschrift, and post-retirement publications

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<sup>5</sup> *Music and Western Man: the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation series*. Edited by Peter Garvie (Toronto: Dent, 1958).

<sup>6</sup> Indeed, the most renowned then in the world: Wilfred Mellers, Egon Wellesz (both composer and musicologist), Alec Robertson, Denis Stevens, Willi Apel, Paul Henry Lang, Gustave Reese, J. A. Westrup, A. K. Holland, H. Wiley Hitchcock, Arthur Hutchings, Anthony Lewis, Lionel Salter, Karl Geiringer, Alfred Frankenstein, William Mann, Andrew Porter, and Aaron Copland (the other composer).

<sup>7</sup> For four summers, from grade 12 to 3<sup>rd</sup> year university (1955-59), I had worked for A.E. Ames and Co, which was later absorbed by Dominion Securities, which in turn was absorbed by the Royal Bank of Canada.

In June 2003, having turned 65 that March, and after 35 years at the University of Toronto, I was subjected to mandatory (involuntary) retirement. Almost immediately, I helped conduct a successful campaign for its abolition, which took place in July 2006, at the University of Toronto; and throughout Ontario, by provincial legislation, in December 2006. Obviously the legislation was not retroactive; but, at the age of 70, I still continue with full-time teaching, research, conferences, and publications, in the fields of textile and monetary-financial history.

At the University of Toronto, I have also supervised or co-supervised 27 doctoral dissertations (some still in progress), chiefly in the Centre for Medieval Studies (for which I served as Associate Director, in 1976-79, and served on its Steering Committee until my forced retirement in 2003). My most recent graduate student, Mr. Philip Slavin, who successfully defended his dissertation on 2 June 2008, will receive his Ph.D. degree later this year: at the University of Toronto Convocation of 13 November 2008.

In March 2004, a number of my former students, now colleagues, organized a conference in my honour; most of those conference papers, along with some additional ones, were published as a *festschrift*: *Money, Markets and Trade in Late Medieval Europe: Essays in Honour of John H.A. Munro*, ed. Lawrin Armstrong, Ivana Elbl and Martin M. Elbl, in the Series: *Later Medieval Europe*, vol. 1 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2007).

Information about this *festschrift* may be found at this URL:

<http://www.brill.nl/default.aspx?partid=18&pid=24419>

To date, I have delivered 82 conference papers, most of them international; authored, co-authored and edited six books (including *Wool, Cloth, and Gold: the Struggle for Bullion in Anglo-Burgundian Trade*), co-edited *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Economic History*, 5 vols. (New York, 2003), and published 91 articles and essays ( of which three more are now in press – two to be published by the end of this year).

### **My motives and reasons for continuing my academic publishing career.**

#### **(a)The question of mandatory retirement at 65:**

One of many reasons why I so strenuously fought to abolish mandatory retirement (at least in universities) was the set of egregiously foolish arguments that Canada's Supreme Court used to uphold the right of Canadian universities to maintain mandatory retirement. They were published in the landmark legal decision, *McKinney v. University of Guelph*, issued by the Supreme Court of Canada in December 1990.<sup>8</sup> Chief Justice Gerald La Forest wrote this majority report, in which he stated, *inter alia*, that 'there is at present a significant problem of an older teaching staff in universities'. In particular, he asserted, with virtually no documentation, 'that on average there is a decline in intellectual ability from the age of 60 onwards',<sup>9</sup> so that 'to raise the retirement age [beyond 65], then, might give rise to greater demands for demeaning [competency] tests for those between the ages of 60 and 65'. He of course simply ignored the fact that no such tests were ever

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<sup>8</sup> In: *McKinney v. University of Guelph*, published in: *Reports of the Supreme Court of Canada*, 1990, vol. 3, pp. 229-449, File No.: 20747: officially cited as: [1990] 3 S.C.R. 229, reproduced in two official web documents: <http://www.canlii.org/ca/cas/scc/1990/1990scc121.html>, and [http://www.lexum.umontreal.ca/csc-scc/en/pub/1990/vol3/html/1990scr3\\_0229.html](http://www.lexum.umontreal.ca/csc-scc/en/pub/1990/vol3/html/1990scr3_0229.html), from the University of Montreal, which provides the original pagination from the Supreme Court publication. In this latter version, the quotation is from [1990] 3 S.C.R. 229.

<sup>9</sup> *McKinney v. University of Guelph* [1990] 3 S.C.R. 229, pp. 289-97

applied in those North American universities where mandatory retirement had already been abolished.<sup>10</sup> In her dissent, Justice Bertha Wilson responded by asking this very pertinent question:<sup>11</sup>

Is the mandatory retirement policy a reflection of the stereotype of old age? Is there an element of human dignity at issue? Are academics being required to retire at age 65 on the unarticulated premise that with age comes increasing incompetence and decreasing intellectual capacity? I think [that] the answer to these questions is clearly yes and that s. 15 [of the Charter] is accordingly infringed.

Yes, there certainly is a question of human dignity involved: and in my view age discrimination is no more justified than any other form of discrimination prohibited by our Charter of Human Rights.<sup>12</sup> So, yes, one motivation for continuing and maintaining my publish career is to refute the obnoxious views of Justice La Forest – and those who supported his views.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Quebec was the first North American jurisdiction to do so, fully, without exceptions, in December 1983. In 1986, the U.S. Congress abolished mandatory retirement for all but university professors; but the provision exempting universities was repealed in Dec. 1993; and since 1 January 1994 no one in the US has been subjected to mandatory retirement, even though most voluntarily do retire in their 60s. Even so, before the Congressional repeal of 1993, professors in American universities had not been required to retire before the age of 70 – in contrast to Canada’s age limit of 65.

<sup>11</sup> *McKinney v. University of Guelph* [1990] 3 S.C.R. 229, p. 393. It is perhaps significant that the only two dissenters to the majority decision were the two female Justices: Bertha Wilson and Claire L’Heureux-Dubé. I suspect that they were better able to relate the sins of age and sexual (gender) discrimination than the five male justices, who supported the majority decision.

<sup>12</sup> For a fuller expression of my views on this subject, see John Munro, ‘The Debate About Mandatory Retirement in Ontario Universities: Positive and Personal Choices About Retirement at 65’, in C.T. (Terry) Gillin, David MacGregor, and Thomas R. Klassen, eds., *Time’s Up: Mandatory Retirement in Canada* (Toronto: Canadian Association of University Teachers and Lorimer Press, 2005), pp. 191-218, 293-302 (notes), 306-320 (volume bibliography). On the vital question of post-65 academic productivity, Prof. Jom Kesselman has stated that there is no convincing evidence that academic productivity declines in the 60-age range, concluding that ‘even if an individual’s work skills do eventually decline with advanced age, there is no evidence that this occurs abruptly at 65 or as early as 65 in most occupations’. He also noted that in many so-called ‘white collar’ occupations, according to one major study, ‘reliability and especially experience seemed to compensate for the effects of somewhat reduced physical abilities’. He contends that those ‘who do experience declining physical, sensory, or mental faculties are more likely to retire voluntarily prior to age 65’, so that an ‘individuals’ labour force participation and retirement decisions can be modelled as a utility-maximizing choice’. In other words, any problems of declining performance are largely a self-correcting and self-adjusting phenomena: that ‘most workers who find their productivity declining tend to self-select into early retirement’. See Jonathan Kesselman, ‘Mandatory Retirement and Older Workers: Encouraging Longer Working Lives’, *C.D. Howe Institute Commentary*, 200 (June 2004), p. 6-7; and Jonathan Kesselman, ‘Challenging the Economic Assumptions of Mandatory Retirement’, in *Time’s Up: Mandatory Retirement in Canada*, pp. 161-80. He cites in particular Josef Richter, ‘Economic Aspects of Ageing: A Review of the Literature’, in Georg Stolnitz, ed., *Demographic Causes and Economic Consequences of Population Aging: Europe and North America* (New York, 1992), p. 181.

<sup>13</sup> On 23 February 2004, in observance of the tenth anniversary of the abolition of mandatory retirement for university professors in the U.S., the *Harvard Crimson* published an editorial that stated the

**(b) A sense of obligation to fulfill to the best of my abilities a research and publication agenda that has been publicly funded.** I may never succeed in all these objectives, but I have a duty to strive to do so; and that means working at a faster and not a slower pace – especially now, having turned 70, when at best I may have only another decade of productive work. Of course, I may well die before reaching 80.

**(c) A large accumulated base of research data,** after 24 visits to Belgian, Dutch, and British archives (as of August 2009). So much accumulated data and other research materials thus permits me to write many more articles, and to do so more quickly than in the past – i.e., before I turned 60. Combining both of these reasons also explains why I am now putting all of my research data online, on both Excel spreadsheets and PDF files, on web pages, linked to my Home Page.

**(d) Over forty years of experience in writing and publishing has, I hope, permitted me to write with greater and more effective facility.** Writing is yet another case of ‘learning by doing’, and thus it becomes all the easier as the years pass. Producing fully written-out lectures for 45 years also helps, in this respect. I do find a close interrelationship between teaching and publishing: one reinforces the other strongly.

**(e) Having established (or so I like to think) a positive reputation in my field of late-medieval economic history has made it easier for me to have articles and essays accepted in peer-reviewed journals and university presses.** Nothing succeed like success, I suppose.

**(f) Academic teaching, research, writing (and publications) are and for over four decades have been the very essence of my life.** This academic life – always integrating research and teaching – is what I want to do, more than anything else; it is also what I have to do, need to do, to maintain my sense of, well, self-worth. I simply cannot retire and do something else. As for teaching itself: I love doing so, and regard it as my ‘elixir of youth’.

**(g) My most important recent publications, over the past six years (and thus post-retirement years)** can be found in my Curriculum Vitae, also found at this URL:

<http://www.economics.utoronto.ca/munro5/1munrocv.pdf>

As my CV indicates, from and since the year of my mandatory retirement, in 2003, I have published or have in press 29 articles and other scholarly papers: nos. 66 to 94, on this list.

My online list of publications also contain links to pdf replicas of many of these publications, as ‘freely available’; and they may be found by connecting with this web link:

<http://www.economics.utoronto.ca/index.php/index/research/publications?personId=51>

My publications posted online – also in PDF files – may also be accessed through this link:

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following: ‘Simply put, older professors are some of the most valuable teachers at Harvard. The faculty who choose to keep working late into their lives do so out of passion. Often they love to teach and excel at it; others stay on because their eclectic research interests still awaken curiosity even after decades of study; and for many more it is a combination of the two. For undergraduates, the chance to interact with these dynamic professors and hear first-hand about their storied careers is one of the most exciting and unique aspects of being a Harvard student. We are grateful to these professors for dedicating their lives to academia.’

[http://mpira.ub.uni-muenchen.de/view/people/Munro,\\_John\\_H=2E.html](http://mpira.ub.uni-muenchen.de/view/people/Munro,_John_H=2E.html)

This following web link will call up all my online Working Papers (to date: 38 posted since 1998, when I had turned 60): similarly in pdf format:

<http://www.economics.utoronto.ca/index.php/index/research/workingPapers>

You must select, in the first box, by the drop down menu, 'All Years'; and in the second box, for 'author, you must type in my name, Munro.

They may also be found, along with the published versions of those working papers, at this URL:

<http://www.economics.utoronto.ca/munro5/WorkingPapers.htm>

I think, therefore, that I may be acquitted of the charge of being elderly 'deadwood' (as the 1990 Supreme Court assumed was the normal fate of academics who had reached the age of 60).