

Donald Alfred Chant
1928-2007



Professor Emeritus Donald Chant, a former chair of zoology and vice-president and provost, died Dec. 23, 2007 of heart failure. He was 79 years old.

Chant was born in Toronto and moved to Vancouver in 1945, where he attended the University of British Columbia, graduating with a BA (hons) in 1950 and an MA in 1952. He received his PhD from the University of London in 1956, returning to Canada that same year.

Upon his return he was appointed a research officer with Canada Agriculture, becoming director of the research station at Vineland in 1960. In 1964 he was appointed chair of the Department of Biological Control at the University of California, Riverside.

In 1967 Chant was recruited from Riverside to serve as chair of U of T's Department of Zoology. When he took over as chair he made a point of wooing talented staff to the budding disciplines of molecular, cell and developmental biology. Among his recruits was University Professor Emeritus Yosio Masui whose work would alter cancer research. A fierce advocate of academic research, Chant encouraged his colleagues to produce science with real-world applications -- and actively participate in issues they could influence, an initiative he led by example.

An expert in natural alternatives to pesticides, Chant was one of Canada's first anti-pollution crusaders and co-founder of Pollution Probe in 1969. "The seriousness of pollution can hardly be overstressed," Chant said in a 1969 interview with U of T's *Graduate* magazine. "There's no question at all that many, many aspects of pollution -- unless we do something about them immediately -- are going to make life in the environment that we inhabit virtually intolerable." Not satisfied with sounding the alarm, he also led the successful fight to ban DDT.

Chant was also a founding member of the Canadian Environmental Law Association, the Canadian Arctic Resources Council, the Coalition on Acid Rain and a number of other conservation and environmental groups. He was also president of the Ontario Waste Management Corporation from 1980 to 1995.

"The people around him from Pollution Probe were lifelong friends and indeed have changed the thinking we have about the environment and about life itself," said Professor David Cook, principal of Victoria College, a friend and colleague who worked with Chant at Simcoe Hall.

After serving his term as chair of zoology in 1975, Chant was appointed vice-president and provost for a five year term ending in 1980. "The administration was far less 'professional' and less pressed then it is now," recalled Cook. Every Friday afternoon, he said, the office held a meeting where they discussed the issues of the week.

"The topics discussed usually included how to get the president (and the other members of the executive group, called Simcoe Circle) to take the decisions we thought were necessary and how to get the deans and principals to live within their budgets. So, perhaps, not so different than today."

Throughout his career at U of T, both as chair of zoology and provost, and in retirement Chant continued his research in acarology -- the study of mites and ticks -- and became internationally known for his lifelong taxonomic work on plant associated mites. A prolific writer, he was author of more than 130 research papers as well as author or co-author of several books.

"During his time as provost he continued to publish papers, often coming to the office with offprints and with obvious excitement about the last discovery. He was equally excited about his students and people in the lab who helped with the science," Cook said.

"It was great to work with Don. I already miss him as do countless others."

Credits to the University of Toronto