

A GEORGE PLANT & CHARLES H. SMITH, FRSC

John Alfred Maxwell
1921-2006



Dr. John Alfred Maxwell was born in Hamilton, Ontario on August 28, 1921, son of the late John Harold and Florence Lillian (Miller) Maxwell. Following his BSc (1949) and MSc (1950) at McMaster University, he moved to the world famous Rock Analysis Laboratory at the University of Minnesota where he completed his PhD (1953) on a geochemical study of chert and related deposits. He joined the Geological Survey of Canada in 1953 when the organization recruited a number of specialists to inaugurate and expand laboratory facilities in response to the recommendations of the National Advisory Committee on Research in the Geological Sciences. Dr. Maxwell brought an exceptional blend of competence in geology, chemistry and physics to the task and under his leadership the analytical laboratories, “the workhorses of the Survey”, were expanded and transformed out of all recognition. Although trained in classical methods, he introduced a broad array of new instrumental methods coupled with efficient and reliable operating procedures such that the laboratories achieved international recognition as one of the major installations of their kind.

Dr. Maxwell was appointed Head, Analytical Chemistry in 1958 and this was followed by other management appointments as Division Chief, Central Laboratories and Technical Services (1971-74), Director, Central Laboratories and Administrative Services (1974-81) and Director, Central Laboratories and Technical Services (1981-84). Although cautious and methodical by nature, he readily supported well researched proposals for new initiatives that would advance analytical and mineralogical studies in the laboratories, and provided wise counsel and encouragement to his staff. He made significant contributions to the management of the Geological Survey of Canada through his membership and leadership of numerous GSC and departmental committees, and was the Geoscience Coordinator for the Canada-Germany Science and Technology Agreement (1977-84). His definitive textbook “*Rock and Mineral Analysis*” was published in 1968 and updated in 1981 to include more detailed discussion of instrumental methods. In 1967 he was appointed a Principal Investigator by the National Aeronautics and Space Administration to study lunar materials to be returned by the Apollo Lunar Missions, and was one of only three analysts invited to analyze the lunar samples using chemical methods. He also served as Coordinator of the lunar sample studies undertaken by the five scientific teams at the Geological Survey of Canada.

He was elected Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada in 1971. He was a charter member of the Geochemical Society and a Fellow of the Chemical Institute of Canada, the Geological Society of America and the Geological Association of Canada. He retired in 1986 and died in Ottawa on October 26, 2006.

Away from the laboratory, theatre, music, tennis, gardening and travel brought much pleasure. John and his wife Helen were among the early supporters of the Stratford Festival and the National Arts Centre Orchestra, and holidays in Europe were usually organized around music and opera festivals. John and Helen were gracious hosts, and friends and colleagues were always assured of an enjoyable time aided by John’s skill in the kitchen, his prodigious memory of cartoons and jokes, and a steady supply of colour slides taken on their holiday travels.

*Charles H. Smith, FRSC
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(Author’s title given as of the time of writing)