

Elton Roy Pounder
1916-2006



It is with regret that I inform you of the death of Emeritus Professor of Physics Elton R. Pounder, F.R.S.C., on Tuesday May 30, 2006, in Montreal, QC. Elton obtained his PhD from McGill in 1937 – at the ripe old age of twenty-one – working with J. S. Foster on the Stark effect. He participated in the design, the construction, and in the early operation of the McGill Cyclotron. During the war years, Elton Pounder served as a navigator in the Royal Canadian Air Force, where he rose to the rank of Wing Commander, and was awarded the Air Force Cross. He returned to McGill as an Assistant Professor in 1945, was promoted to Associate Professor in 1948, and was made Full Professor in 1959. He was appointed Macdonald Professor of Physics in 1976. After his retirement, Elton Pounder was made Emeritus Professor of Physics in 1982.

Elton has played a key role in the development of sea ice research in Canada. In 1955 he formed the Ice Research Project at McGill and directed that group up to his retirement. He spearheaded research on the physical properties of sea ice in the country. He has pioneered studies of the movement of floating ice covers in the Gulf of St. Lawrence and in Arctic waters. In doing so, he became a much sought-after authority and has served on many national and international committees, such as the Canadian Committee on Oceanography, and its working group on Ice in Navigable Waters, the Snow and Ice Sub-committee of the National Research Council Associate Committee on Geotechnical Research, and the Committee of Snow and Ice of the International Association of Scientific Hydrology. He has published widely in the scientific literature. His monograph on the Physics of Ice, published in 1965, found immediate acceptance, appearing in print at the beginning of an era of rapid northern development and hydrocarbon exploration. The considerable increase of winter shipping to inland ports through the ice-infested waters of the Gulf of St. Lawrence in the late sixties was aided by increased knowledge of the behavior of the ice pack, to which he contributed.

Professor Elton Pounder was a remarkable instructor, deeply committed to the teaching of physics, at all levels. Upon his return to McGill as an Assistant Professor, he appropriately was assigned the difficult task of teaching introductory physics to the large group of war veterans who were resuming their formal education. During his distinguished career as a Professor, Elton taught almost every course offered by the Department of Physics, ranging from introductory astrophysics to advanced quantum mechanics. His dedication to Physics Education manifested itself early, and led to his co-writing of an introductory physics textbook: “Physics”, with J. S. Marshall, published in 1957.

In his quiet and unassuming way, Professor Pounder has been totally devoted to McGill University. His long service to the community has included active membership on innumerable committees at the departmental, faculty, and university level. He served as the chair of the Matriculation Board, on the Athletics Board, the University Library Committee, the University Scholarship Committee, and the Senate. He served as president of the McGill Association of University Teachers. When the CEGEP system was being developed, he acted as McGill representative on Ministry of Education committees.

The Senate extends its condolences to Professor Elton Pounder’s son David, daughter Norval, step-daughter Gerry Jansen, to his grandchildren, and to his friends. Professor Pounder was predeceased in 1976 by his wife Marion. We have lost a colleague who greatly enriched the life of this university.

*Credits to McGill University
Note addressed to Principal Munroe-Blum
“Resolution on the Death of Emeritus Professor Elton R. Pounder”*