

Wilfred Templeman 1908-1990

Canada lost one of its most revered fisheries scientists when Dr. Wilfred Templeman died at St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador, on April 5 1990 at the age of 82.

Templeman was born in 1908 at Bonavista, Newfoundland, and attended primary school there, before completing his senior matriculation at the Methodist College in St. John's. He became one of first students in biology at the Memorial University College in St. John's which he attended for 2 years, as was the custom of the times. He completed a BSc degree (with distinction) at Dalhousie University in Halifax, Nova Scotia, in 1930. Upon his graduation, he was awarded a Canada Fisheries Research Board graduate scholarship which he took up at the University of Toronto under the renowned Dr. A.G. Huntsman. He graduated with a MSc in 1931 and PhD in 1933 at the age of 25.

Dr. Templeman had a distinguished career as a fisheries scientist. His first job was as a Lecturer at McGill, a position he held from 1933 to 1936. But his love for Newfoundland soon brought him home. At the urging of the first President of Memorial College, J.L. Paton, Templeman returned to Newfoundland, first to head up the Biology Department at Memorial, which then focused on fisheries biology. He was made full Professor in 1943. He then became Director of the Newfoundland Government Fisheries Laboratory, which evolved into the Biological Station of the Fisheries Research Board of Canada after confederation with Canada in 1949. Dr. Templeman was director of both labs until his official retirement in 1972. As such, he oversaw the transfer of authority from Newfoundland to Canada. He maintained his attachment and commitment to fisheries science at Memorial throughout this period, holding a visiting professorship from 1957 until retirement, and thereafter as J.L Paton Professor of Marine Biology and Fisheries from 1972-1982. From 1983 until his death he continued his work at the newly formed Northwest Atlantic Fisheries Research Centre in St. John's, under the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, which succeeded the Canadian Fisheries Research Board.

During his long and distinguished career, there were few subjects in marine fisheries to which Dr. Templeman did not contribute. His work and publications are legion, and include more than 250 scientific papers. His work is marked by a combination of scientifically-derived knowledge and hard-won wisdom about the marine ecosystems and fisheries of Newfoundland and Labrador. His approach was rooted in boyhood observations from the wharfs of Bonavista. In a report on Atlantic mackerel incursions on the northeast coast of Newfoundland, there was some doubt about whether or not mackerel had been present before 1940. To remove all doubt, it was sufficient to state that Wilfred Templeman had spent his boyhood at Bonavista, and had never seen a mackerel until 1940! Templeman's publications included seminal works on species as diverse as lobsters, salmon, capelin and haddock, and publications on rare fishes and seabirds and oceanographic influences on fish. Although cited as an authority on many fisheries topics, Templeman is best known for his work on groundfish, in particular Atlantic cod. His bulletin

“Marine Resources of Newfoundland” will remain an all-time classic scientific work on the Newfoundland fisheries.

In recognition of his many contributions to marine and fisheries science, Dr. Templeman was awarded the Order of the British Empire (OBE) in 1948 and became a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada in 1950. He received an Honorary D.Sc. degree from Memorial University of Newfoundland in 1982 and a research vessel took his name.

I first encountered Dr. Templeman’s work at McGill, where my Ph.D. dissertation largely consisted of exploring and testing several theories that he had put forward decades earlier on cod migrations and movements in coastal waters. Like him, I returned to my birthplace in Newfoundland to take a job in the fisheries. Little did I know that my first office would be just down the hall from the man people called “Old Temp”. Although in his 80s and long retired, “Temp” worked every day, even on weekends, more often than not clad comfortably in slippers. His knowledge was enormous, and his interest in the fishery unshakeable. To a young and unknown scientist he was an icon. Nevertheless, he read each of my papers, and was eager to discuss the details. He never forgot his role as a teacher and mentor, and I will never forget his insight and helpfulness.

Dr. Wilfred Templeman was one of the most accomplished of a generation of natural scientists. In many ways he was the “father” of fisheries science in Newfoundland and Labrador. He was among the first to draw attention to the unsustainable fishing practices of the foreign trawlers in the 1950s and 1960s. He was a scholar, an educator, and an administrator. With his passing, fisheries and marine science in Canada and Newfoundland and Labrador has lost one of its scientific icons. I shall remember him best as “Old Temp”, a brilliant, insightful though humble man, who possessed an unparalleled knowledge and interest in the fisheries of his beloved Newfoundland.

*George A. Rose
Chair of Fisheries Conservation, Marine Institute
Memorial University of Newfoundland.*

(Author’s title given as of the time of writing)