

Heraldry not just a hobby

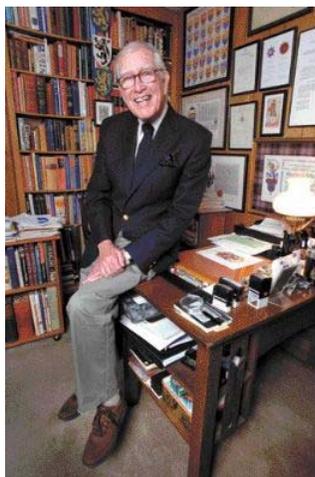
Order of Canada for Burlington man

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THE HAMILTON SPECTATOR
(Jul 14, 2008)
Gordon Macpherson, 81, of Burlington, has been awarded the Order of Canada for his heraldry work. Left: bookplates for Rt. Rev. Ralph Spence, retired bishop of Niagara, and Hilary Weston, former Ontario lieutenant-governor.

The mastery that gained Gordon Macpherson an international reputation as a heraldic artist now has brought the Burlington resident an appointment as member of the Order of Canada.



Macpherson, 81, was one of 75 appointments announced this month by Governor General Michaëlle Jean. He was recognized for his contribution to the visual arts through the creation of Canadian coats of arms.

His work can be found on the letters patent granted to municipalities, corporations and individuals and in an impressive portfolio of more than 230 armorial bookplates.

A founder of the Royal Heraldry Society of Canada in 1967, Macpherson helped preserve a mediaeval art form. His classically styled shields of arms and bookplates are sought by men and women who want to mark their own Canadian identities and achievements.

Heraldry first captured his attention when he was a teenager growing up in Toronto. In high school, Macpherson noticed a friend's attempt to draw a coat of arms. Intrigued, he went to the library in search of different coats of arms and specifically the clan Macpherson.

"That's how I got interested in heraldry, and it then became a hobby of mine, which I've enjoyed -- my goodness me -- for 60 years now," said the self-taught artist.

Following a career giving investment advice, Macpherson retired at age 60 as a vice-president at RBC Dominion Securities in Hamilton. His timing was perfect, for a few months later, in 1988, the Canadian Heraldic Authority was established.

Until then, any individual or corporation within the Commonwealth that wished to get a coat of arms had to petition one of the Queen's two heraldic offices, in London and in Edinburgh.

The establishment of a Canadian authority for granting arms created an immediate demand for heraldic artists trained in this country.

Macpherson, who was self-taught and one of the most respected Canadian heraldic artists, was invited to join the authority.

The first Canadian patent of arms, a document with an illustration of the arms, was granted to the City of Quebec and painted by Macpherson. His next project was the personal arms of then-governor general Jeanne Sauvé.

"Any Canadian citizen can apply for a grant of arms, and the only person they would have some question about is somebody with a criminal record ... as far as I know, nobody has ever been refused a grant of arms," Macpherson said.

Heraldry is still in use with cities and towns around the world displaying shields of arms on buildings, flags and stationery. Personal heraldry is found on stained-glass windows, engraved on family heirlooms and on bookplates.

In 1999, his contribution to Canadian heraldry was recognized by then-governor general Romeo LeBlanc, who appointed Macpherson Niagara Herald Extraordinary.

After 54 years of marriage and raising two children, the talented octogenarian continues to work nearly every day on armorial designs with his distinctive flourish of pen and brush. He is blessed with a steady hand, good concentration and clear vision, he said.

"If somebody asked me, 'What did you do to get this award?' I would simply say, in all honesty, that all I did was enjoy my hobby. They say if you can get a job that you thoroughly enjoy and look forward to, you never have to work a day in your life."

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