

Dr. E. R. Seary Remembered

In October 1984 the Newfoundland Geographical Names Board approved Searys Peak for the 240 metre hill lying north of the Trans Canada Highway, 4 km. west of Broad Lake in Bellevue District. This feature now bears the name of Professor Edgar Ronald Seary, a distinguished scholar and researcher in Newfoundland place and family names. Dr. Seary died in May 1984.

Born in Sheffield, England, in 1908, Dr. Seary gained his B.A., M.A., and PhD. in that city before pursuing his academic career in Mannheim, Germany (1933); Grahamstown, South Africa (1935-51) and Baghdad, Iraq (1951-53). In 1953 he became Head of the Department of English at Memorial University. On relinquishing this position in 1971, he held the Henrietta Harvey Professorship in English until he was made Professor Emeritus on his retirement in 1978.

Dr. Seary's distinguished career as a scholar and writer embraced a great interest in Newfoundland toponymy. As author of *Place names of the Avalon Peninsula of the Island of Newfoundland* (1971), he produced both an important contribution to the province's geographical names and a model in toponymic methodology. Previously Dr. Seary associated with G.M. Story and W. Kirwin in the writing of the 1968 publication *The Avalon Peninsula of Newfoundland: an ethnolinguistic study*.

Professor Seary is ranked highly among those scholars who have moved toponymy to the status of a vigorous linguistic discipline. His work on the Avalon Peninsula involved the meticulous examination of place names as they occurred in a variety of printed sources, including maps, and then classifying them according to their historical, linguistic, and cultural forms.

Dr. Seary found that one of the major influences on Newfoundland toponymy was the cultural heritage of settlers, as so many places bore the names of families. Consequently, he felt that a study of family names, including the research of geographical names and linguistic origins and evidence of residency in Newfoundland was a vital exercise in furthering toponymic knowledge. His book *Family names of the Island of Newfoundland* (1977) proved to be one of the most popular local publications ever printed, as it includes basic genealogical information on

all Newfoundland families. For the toponymist it is another indispensable reference.

Professor Seary's interest in Newfoundland toponymy led him to serve as a member of the Newfoundland Nomenclature Board, and later to be a valuable source of information for the present Newfoundland Geographical Names Board. Now Searys Peak will remind future generations of an eminent scholar to the documentation and interpretation of Newfoundland's geographical names.

* Based on correspondence from Dr. W.G. Handcock, Memorial University, and a Press Release from the Department of Forest Resources and Lands, St. John's, on November 23, 1984.

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