

**UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA, DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMICS**

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**Clarence Lyle Barber  
(1917-2004)**

Clarence Lyle Barber was born 17 May 1917 near Wolseley, Saskatchewan, and spent the first nineteen years of his life on the family farm. During the most impressionable years of his life he witnessed the devastating effect of the Great Depression upon one of the most vulnerable sectors, in one of the most vulnerable regions, of the North American economy. This indelible experience shaped Barber's choice of study and profoundly affected his way of thinking, his recurrent concern with business cycles and the origin of the Great Depression, his abiding interest in the problems of Canadian farmers, his vivid awareness of the openness and dependence of the Canadian economy, and his willingness to work at unglamorous but useful tasks for provincial and national governments all reflect it.

Barber entered the University of Saskatchewan in 1937, graduating with Honours in Economics in 1940; the following year he took the MA at Clark, and then moved to the University of Minnesota for two years, completing the course-work for his doctorate in 1943. After two years with the Royal Canadian Air Force he joined the staff of the Dominion Bureau of Statistics in the National Income unit. The academic year of 1948/49 he spent at McMaster University and it was there that his first professional writing appeared in print. In September 1949 he came to the University of Manitoba where he remained until retirement in 1983. From 1963 until 1972 he served as Head of the Department of Economics, presiding over an unprecedented, and for the most part successful, expansion.

Barber's doctoral thesis on *Inventories and the Business Cycle with Special Reference to Canada* (Minnesota 1952) was the turning point of his career. The years from 1953 to 1971 were crowded with academic achievement, public service and those useful but distracting activities which in the contemporary university dissipate so much of an able and successful scholar's creative energy. In 1954-55 Barber was Visiting Professor at Queen's University; from 1957 to 1959 Economic Adviser and Director of Research for the Manitoba Royal Commission on Flood Cost-Benefit; he was President of the CAW during the Crowe scandal at United College which transformed the hitherto benign relations between faculty and administration in Canadian universities; in 1959-60 he was Senior United Nations Adviser on National Income to the government of the Philippines; in 1964-65 Visiting Professor at McGill; and from 1966 to 1970 implemented single-handedly the Canadian Royal Commission on Farm Machinery. During these eighteen years, for the last nine of which he was department head, Barber published eleven articles in professional journals, at least one and possibly two of which can be regarded as seminal; one book and four book-length research reports; and no fewer than five very solid Royal Commission reports culminating in the massive *Report of the Royal Commission on Farm Machinery* (1971).

In 1971, having brought his work for the latest Royal Commission to a successful conclusion, Barber entered a more tranquil stage of his scholarly career. He never abandoned his perennial interest in Canadian macro-economic policy: he was Commissioner on Welfare for the government of Manitoba in 1972, a member of the National Commission on Inflation in 1979, and of the-Macdonald Royal Commission on the Canadian economy of 1982. But in his mid-fifties much of his work began to take on a more reflective character, and to be addressed to long-term issues and fundamental questions. In this he was encouraged by the public recognition he began to receive. He became President of the Canadian Economic Association in 1973, the only member of the University of Manitoba so far to have received this honour. In 1977 he was elected to the Royal Society of Canada; in 1982 he was made Distinguished Professor in the University of Manitoba; in 1988 he was awarded an Honorary Doctorate by the University of Guelph and enrolled as an Officer of the Order of Canada; and in 2001 he was among the first to receive the newly created Order of Manitoba.

Though some of these honours recognized Barber's valuable public service, most were the reward of his distinguished contributions to economics. His article on Canadian Tariff Policy (1955) identified the concept of effective tariff protection -now known in the literature as the Barber-Corden measure of effective tariff protection because of its independent discovery at about the same time by the eminent Australian economist W. M. Corden. His 1961 paper on Canada's Unemployment Problem (1962) analysed the relation between monetary and fiscal policy measures, capital flows and the exchange rate in a manner formally identical to that of a classic article in the same year by R. A. Mundell, who later received the Nobel Prize. But Mundell's analysis was formal and mathematical: Barber's purely literary, and imbedded in a down-to-earth discussion of concrete problems of the Canadian economy. Clarence Barber was perhaps the last economist of international stature who was able to make important contributions to economic theory as the unintended consequence of practical policy discussion, making no use whatsoever of any technical equipment. It is utterly typical of Barber that virtually all of his articles were submitted to the *Canadian Journal of Economics* and its predecessor, rather than to the more famous American and British journals in which his name would have been made more quickly. Seldom has an international reputation been achieved with less braying of the academic trumpet.

Withal, Clarence was a kindly man, fair-minded, judicious and honourable. He married Barbara (Babs) Ann Patchet in 1947 and they had four sons. Generations of younger colleagues remember fondly their generous hospitality, engaging conversation and good fellowship, both at their house in River Heights and in their cottage which the Barbers continued to visit each summer for many years after retirement and the move to Victoria in 1983. But Clarence's last years were clouded by disability. He died in Victoria on 26 February 2004, and is survived by Babs and their children.