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### **Stephen Leacock**

There have been thousands of authors and composers who have dazzled the literary world and Canada has supplied quite a few of these famous people. Stephen Butler Leacock is definitely one of these great writers. Not only has Leacock written about such serious subjects as economics, political science and education, but he has also produced many humorous books.

#### **Childhood**

Stephen Butler Leacock was born on December 30, 1869 at Swanmore, Hampshire, in England. His parents, Peter Leacock and Agnes Emma Butler were secretly married on New Year's Day in 1867. The two families were long-standing friends. However, neither family agreed with the marriage because in their eyes Peter, who was 18 years old at the time, and Agnes, 22 years of age, were entirely too young to be married.

In 1876, the Leacock family emigrated to Canada and settled on a 100-acre farm just south of Lake Simcoe. This rough farm life would affect Stephen Leacock's work.

#### **Personal Facts**

Stephen later attended Upper Canada College in Toronto and graduated as Head Boy in 1887. He returned to his farm to find his father penniless and drinking. During the summer, Peter Leacock came into some money and announced that he was leaving with no mention of where he was going and when he would be coming back. He never returned. Stephen continued with his education and later became a teacher.

On August 7, 1900, Leacock married Beatrix (Trix) Hamilton, an aspiring actress. Fifteen years later, on August 19, their first and only child, Stephen Lushington, was born. Unfortunately, on December 15, 1925, Beatrix Leacock died after battling breast cancer for 4 years. Leacock then threw himself into the research of cancer and he also contributed financially by committing himself to fundraising drives. He also took a great interest in his son's glandular malfunction, which caused Stephen Jr. to be undersized. On March 28, 1944, Stephen Butler Leacock died of throat cancer.

### Contribution

Stephen Butler Leacock contributed greatly to the worlds of literature, political science, education, and economics. Many of his books became standard university textbooks. For the most part, Stephen Leacock was known for his humour.

There are also several awards and honours named after Stephen Leacock. The "Stephen Leacock Medal for Humour" has been awarded yearly since 1947 to the best humorous book by a Canadian author. There are also a few museums, a hotel, and many university buildings which carry his name. In 1969, the Government of Canada issued a six-cent stamp in his honour.

### Weird Facts

Finally, it's worth mentioning that Stephen Leacock was once quoted as saying that school teaching was "a dead end into which young men were trapped by the initial chance to make what looked like a good salary" (Davies, *Stephen Leacock*, p. 15). What is interesting about this is that Leacock went on to teach for nearly five decades. Another noteworthy fact is that Stephen Leacock has a mountain in the Yukon's Saint Elias range that is named in his honour. What is also fascinating is that Stephen Leacock apparently wrote a few racy novels under the pen name of Lance Hardwick. These stories caused a great uproar and two men

were put on trial in 1901 for having some of these novels in their possession. Eventually they were both released with small fines of 50 \$ each.

In conclusion, Stephen Leacock lived quite the life and he will definitely be remembered, not only for his literary contributions but also for his humour and his kindness. As a person who enjoys reading, I can greatly appreciate what this man has given to literature. Stephen Leacock was one of those great people who definitely left the world a better place.

## Works Cited

Legate, David M. Stephen Leacock. Toronto: MacMillan of Canada, 1978, 134 pages.

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