

**MEMORIAL RESOLUTION OF THE FACULTY
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON**

ON THE DEATH OF PROFESSOR EMERITA CATHARINE McCLELLAN

Catharine “Kitty” McClellan, a pioneer arctic ethnographer and a leading cultural anthropologist of the Alaskan and Yukon regions, died in Peterborough, NH, on March 3, 2009. Born in the Penn Dutch town of York, PA in 1921, she graduated Bryn Mawr College in 1942 and immediately joined the first cohort of WAVES. In 1946 she entered Berkeley’s anthropology program, finishing her Ph.D. in 1950. In 1947, an archaeological survey preliminary to the building of the Saint Lawrence Seaway brought Kitty to Canada, setting her lifelong northern orientation. Her early career included posts at the universities of Missouri and Washington before she left Barnard to join Madison’s anthropology department in 1961. She was named John Bascom Professor in 1973 and retired to emerita status in 1983. Along the way, she gave the year 1956 to studying Inuit public health for the US Public Health Service’s Arctic Health Research Center and held a visiting post at the University of Alaska-Fairbanks.

Kitty’s dissertation began with a journey up the newly built Alaska Highway to survey the area’s native populations for the Museum of Canada. Shortly afterward, she assisted the widely noted anthropologist Frederica de Laguna in a study on coastal Tlinkit communities; de Laguna’s mentorship gave rise to a lifelong collegial friendship. In succeeding years Kitty’s exceptionally frequent, detailed and open-ended fieldwork yielded a now-classic shelf of studies about Athapaskan residents of the southern Yukon Territory. Holding fast to the Boasian ideal of a holistic anthropology with a strong historic thrust, she gave her ample energy to archaeological surveys and the ethnohistoric study of archives as well as to face-to-face fieldwork. She was skeptical of hypothesis-based structured research, considering it the ethnographer’s duty to let the world surprise her.

Kitty McClellan was a founding member of Madison’s Women’s Studies Program, and her ethnography is rich in female voices. She served on several committees concerning the status of women in academe. She did not particularly identify with feminist movements nor did she think restrictions on female professionals had shaped her career. Yet, she was interested in gender and Athapaskan concepts that posit different male and female sources of power. When she married her fellow anthropologist and Madison colleague John Hitchcock in 1974, she had for a quarter of a century been ignoring the warning Canadian authorities gave her against “woman alone” expeditions.

“People used stories to instruct me,” Kitty remembered in an interview with Ann Stoler. Kitty’s publications emphasize oral tradition and life history. The voices of her hosts always ring through; her best-known book is titled *My Old People Say*. In teaching, she strongly emphasized fieldwork ethics and her conviction that ethnographic relationships must be ties of trust and reciprocity. She generously worked for Indian organizations in negotiation with Canadian authorities and prepared school texts for Yukon K-12 schools. Kitty’s fellow arctic specialist, Julie Cruikshank, comments, “A generation of Yukon Indians . . . refer to Catharine McClellan as ‘our Kitty’ and see her primary residence as the Yukon, with periodic ‘field trips’ back to her university.” On April 18, 2009, more than sixty of her friends came to her memorial gathering in Whitehorse. Her Madison colleagues, too, regret her passing. She has given us a lot to live up to.

MEMORIAL COMMITTEE

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