



## Robert Theodore Holt

July 26, 1928 - April 25, 2020

Robert Theodore Holt, 91, passed away on Saturday April 25 at the Jones Harrison Residence in Minneapolis, surrounded in spirit by his family. Bob was larger than life: a devoted husband, father, and grandfather, an influential academic, a fun-loving world traveler, sailor, car enthusiast, DIYer, master griller, a deeply kind and caring man, and a walking encyclopedia all rolled into one.

He was born in July 1928 in Caledonia, Minnesota, son of John Oscar Martin, a Methodist minister, and Olga Linnea (Mattson) Holt. The family moved often, living in West Concord, WI, Aiken, Olivia, Minneapolis, and Mandan, ND.

Growing up in rural Minnesota in the 1930s and 40s, Bob took whatever jobs were available, amassing a diverse resume including grave digger, telephone lineman, farmer, printer, cowboy, steel worker, and truck driver. This background gave him a broad skill set and a daunting mixture of empathy and self-confidence, which, combined with his razor-sharp mind and passion for curiosity and adventure, made him a force of nature.

Bob graduated from Patrick Henry High School in Minneapolis in 1946 excelling in multiple activities, including quarterbacking the football team and winning State awards for the speech team. He attended Hamline University, graduating magna cum laude in 1950 with degrees in History and Psychology. He went on to study at Princeton University, receiving a Master's Degree in Public Affairs in 1952 and a PhD in Politics in 1957. He served in the United States Army in Germany from 1953-1955 developing programs in strategic

psychological warfare. Bob joined the University of Minnesota Political Science faculty in 1956. In 1957, he married Shirley Russell, a fellow Patrick Henry graduate and graduate student at the U.

Bob would remain at the “U” for his entire career, distinguishing himself as an inspiring professor, innovative and prolific scholar, and gifted administrator. He chaired the Political Science department from 1978-81. In 1967, he founded and directed the Center for Comparative Studies in Technology Development and Social Change, a ground-breaking interdisciplinary research institute which brought together scholars from anthropology to math and engineering. From 1982 to 1991, Bob served as Dean of the Graduate School, becoming an influential national leader in graduate education. An energetic fundraiser and champion extraordinaire, he strengthened the quality, reputation and financial foundation of Minnesota graduate programs. He obtained funding for first-year Graduate School Fellowships for top recruits and Doctoral Dissertation Fellowships for the top PhD students in their final year of research. He was instrumental in providing full tuition and health insurance benefits for Graduate Assistants. He persuaded the McKnight Foundation to provide a major grant to support McKnight Professorships for top newly-tenured faculty members. He established interdisciplinary groups that led to new and innovative PhD programs including Neuroscience and Conservation Biology. He served on the boards of national graduate education institutions including the Association of Graduate Schools, the Council on Research Policy and Graduate Education, and as chairman of the Council of Graduate Schools.

After stepping down as the Graduate School Dean, he went back to teaching in the Political Science Department. He served as interim Dean of the College of Liberal Arts in 1996. Bob formally retired in 1999 at age 71 but continued to serve the university in many different capacities. He taught regularly, often partnering with colleagues in other disciplines. He chaired the committee to renovate the University’s Campus Club and joined the University of Minnesota’s Retirement Association (UMRA) and was its President from 2009

to 2010. He taught classes for the Osher Life-Long Learning Institute (OLLI) until he was 90. Up until his death, he met and spoke regularly with fellow Deans, colleagues, and former students, advocating for and working to improve the University he loved.

Bob was the author and co-author of many books and countless articles, advancing scholarship in Political Science through his unique perspective and multi-disciplinary approach. He served on many national boards and committees including the American Political Science Association, the National Research Council, and the International Studies Association. He was loved by his students, many of whom continued to stay in contact with him over decades as fellow collaborators or simply for his mentorship and friendship. Bob had many interests outside academia. He was an energetic member of St. Paul's Episcopal church; was active in neighborhood organizations, coached kids' softball teams, organized sailing expeditions, lovingly maintained his 1890s-era Kenwood home, restored two antique British cars, and renovated his beloved Lost Land Lake cabin. He was a great lover of music and a long-time patron of the Minnesota Orchestra and the Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra.

His curiosity and passion for knowledge was unbounded. Bob was a voracious reader who kept up with current affairs and the latest scientific and academic research until the end of his life. He and Shirley were intrepid world travelers. They lived in rural Morocco, England, Norway, and Turkey and Bob's lecture invitations took them even further afield, to places like Yemen, China, India, South Korea, Bangladesh, and Mexico.

Bob was a deeply loving and caring man and a devoted husband, father, grandfather, uncle, neighbor and friend. He took his sick kids to the office with him. He taught his daughters to ice skate, ski, bike, ride horses, throw balls, use power tools, and drive a stick shift. He loved spending time with his grandchildren and reveling in their accomplishments. The Holt family home in Kenwood was a place of refuge, inspiration, and celebration, hosting all kinds

of gatherings from family and neighborhood parties to elaborate dinners with international film directors and British Prime Ministers.

Robert is survived by his wife, Shirley, daughters, Susan (John) Fisher, Ann Holt (Tom Welna), and Sharon Holt (Andreas Broesse), grandchildren, Sasha and Luke Hulsey, Ingrid and Avery Welna, Saskia and Alexander Broesse and numerous nieces and nephews. He was preceded in death by his parents Oscar and Olga Holt, sisters Shirley Mink and Katherine Bergum, and granddaughter Aurora Jane Hulsey.

Memorials to St. Paul's Church on Lake of the Isles, or to the Robert and Shirley Holt Discovery Fellowship Fund #5797 at the University of Minnesota Foundation. A private funeral and burial was held Thursday, April 30. A celebration of Bob's life will be held at a future date.

[www.Washburn-McReavy.com](http://www.Washburn-McReavy.com)

Davies Chapel 612-377-2203

# Cemetery Details

## Lakewood Cemetery (Minneapolis)

3600 Hennepin Avenue South  
Minneapolis, MN 55408

# Tribute Wall

JM

“ I’m Jim’s brother in law. We have lived all over the country and not in MN so our association with Bob was mostly through Joan and Jim. We met I thing twice. I certainly admired Bobs career at University of Minnesota, having spent a fair amount of my time with Lehigh, MIT and Cornell Doing consortia work. While I’m in business, I have a great appreciation for what Bob and others in academia do. Our thought go to Shirley and family. Im sure Bob will be missed and he would want you all to enjoy life to its fullest

*John & Louise MacWilliams*

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**john macwilliams** - May 01, 2020 at 04:38 PM

KR

“ Dearest Mrs Holt, Ann, Sharon, Susan and the rest of the Holt Family:

*As friends of Sharon, we as a sisterhood send our love and condolences to you all. This was a remarkable life and a remarkable man - I was grateful to have met him years ago when we were all heading to our friend, Linda McGinnis' wedding in Montana. Papa Holt and Mama Holt first hosted us all in their gracious home in Minneapolis - Kenwood. Then they lent us their wonderful Buick station wagon in which Sharon, Jill, Lily and Kavita drove to Big Sky, Montana. During our time at the Woodrow Wilson School and later at the World Bank we benefited so much from hearing Mr. Holt's insights via our friend Sharon. We are in awe of the intellectual depth of this man, but also of the warmth and kindness that we all experienced first hand and second hand. We send you our love and strength and wishes for being able to holding up his spirit even in this time of loss.*

*The sisterhood of Sharon - Ann McDermott, Maniza Naqvi, Lily Mulatu, Kavita Ramdas, Linda McGinnis*

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**Kavita Ramdas** - May 01, 2020 at 03:08 PM

KI

“ Dear Shirley, Susan, Ann and Sharon with families. I am deeply sorry about your great loss and send my warmest condolences to you all. Bob was the first I got in touch with during my search for relatives in US. He did indeed help me and we had such a nice and close connection, which I appreciated so much. I am deeply grateful I got the opportunity to meet him during our visit in MN 2018. Rest in peace my dear cousin, you will be missed.



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**Kolbjørn Ingebrigtsen** - May 01, 2020 at 06:17 AM

KS

“ *Uncle Bob was an amazing. smart, caring man. We are so grateful to have been apart of his life. My favorite memory is every year during Lutefisk Uncle Bob would light the sugar on fire for our adult cocktail bowl- I always thought everything would lit on fire- but it never did :) My family and kids will always remember Uncle Bob <3 You are our Forever Angel*

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**Kaycee Simon** - April 30, 2020 at 12:17 PM

JM

“ *John McGowan lit a candle in memory of Robert Theodore Holt*



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**John McGowan** - April 30, 2020 at 11:22 AM

JM

*Dear Susan and family. He sounds like a truly remarkable man. To enjoy but a portion of it with him must have been a true blessing. Regards to all, you are in my thoughts and prayers.*

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**John McGowan** - April 30, 2020 at 11:25 AM