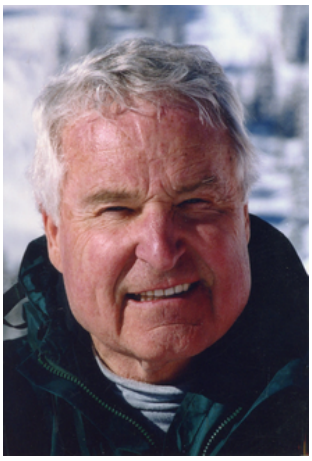


James LeRoy Clayton

July 28, 1931 ~ October 20, 2022

James LeRoy Clayton, former Provost, Dean of the Graduate School, and Director of the Honors Program at the University of Utah, died of cancer on October 20, 2022. He was 91 years old and died peacefully, surrounded by his family. Jim was a warm, loving, and witty husband and father. His greatest love was for his children and grandchildren.

Jim served as Provost from 1986–1990, Dean of the Graduate School from 1978–1986, and Director of the Honors Program from 1967–1970. He was also elected President of the Western Association of Graduate Schools from 1981–1982, and served for several years on the Council of Graduate Schools in the United States. In his later years he was elected a Life Fellow in Clare College at the University of Cambridge.

He also won several prizes and awards, including a fellowship to study with Fredrich Hayek and Ludwig von Mises at NYU in 1960, the Solon J. Buck Prize from the Minnesota Historical Society, and received research grants from Thiokol Corporation, the Social Science Research Council, and the American Philosophical Society.

Upon his retirement from the Provost's office, the University's Institutional Council commended his service as Provost for "showing great sensitivity in dealing with complex student and faculty problems, advocacy for women and minority programs, and spearheading undergraduate initiative efforts."

Jim wrote or edited four books: "The Economic Impact of the Cold War" (1970); "On The Brink: Defense, Deficits, and Welfare Spending" (1979); "Does Defense Beggar Welfare? Myths vs. Realities" (1979); and "The Global Debt Bomb" (2000). He also published 24 articles in professional journals and national magazines, several using history to address contemporary fiscal problems.

He was perhaps best known for his research on the long-term costs of the Vietnam Conflict which he presented to a subcommittee of the Joint Economic Committee of the Congress in 1969, which was reported in over 200 newspapers worldwide. His biggest disappointment in his research efforts was the lack of interest in his book "The Global Debt Bomb," which was published years before the global debt crisis emerged, was based on the work of the liberal Berkeley economist Hyman Minsky (who was then also ignored but today is almost universally lauded for his theories), and included a preface by Peter Peterson, a well-known conservative market analyst.

During his 45 years at the University of Utah, Jim won three university-wide distinguished teaching awards: The University Teaching Award, Distinguished Honors Professor, and University Professor. He was also elected to Phi Beta Kappa and Phi Kappa Phi, and received a "Merit of Honor Award" from the Emeritus Alumni Board.

In 2002, Jim was appointed a Visiting Fellow at the University of Cambridge and subsequently elected a Life Fellow in Clare Hall College. The appointment was his most satisfying professional achievement, and he was a frequent visitor there. At Cambridge, Jim worked on the intellectual origins of the Establishment Clause of the Constitution.

He also co-taught a course at the University of Utah's Law school for several years on the origins of the U.S. Constitution with U.S. Tenth Circuit Judge and Distinguished Professor Michael McConnell. Earlier, Jim was a Visiting Professor at Dartmouth College and the University of Science in Malaysia. Most of the courses he taught related to U.S. Constitutional history and economic and fiscal issues.

In his honor, in 2005, the University of Utah History Department established the "James L. Clayton Distinguished Research Chair," and in 2021 the Honors College established a housing scholarship for first-generation students in his name. There is also an office and honorary plaque dedicated to Jim in the new Honors Building.

Jim earned a BA degree in history from the University of Utah and his PhD at Cornell University, served in the Counter Intelligence Corps of the U.S. Army in Vienna, and briefly on the Austrian Desk of the Central Intelligence Agency in Washington D.C. He enjoyed classical music, operas, and membership in several discussion groups. Skiing and exploring the Wasatch Mountains were his favorite physical activities. But his greatest pleasure was being with his grandchildren.

Jim was married to Geraldine Horsley, now deceased, for 51 years. Gerrie also graduated from the "U" earning both a BA and an MA degree. She was a locally well-known garden designer and artist. They had the most respectful and loving partnership. They are survived by their three children, Creed, Kitty, and Andrea; and four grandchildren, Scout, Sara, Conor, and Megan.

A celebration of life will be held at 5:00 PM on November 13th in the Orangerie at Red Butte Garden.

This obituary was substantially written by Jim himself, with light edits from his family