



## IN MEMORIAM

John Johnston  
Professor of Economics, Emeritus  
Irvine  
1923 — 2003

John (Jack) Johnston, professor emeritus of economics at the University of California at Irvine, passed away on October 14, 2003, at the age of 80. He was an extraordinary man, superb researcher and dedicated teacher who invariably lived up to the high standards he expected of his students and colleagues. He is perhaps best known as the author of the first and still one of the most popular econometric textbooks, *Econometric Methods*.

Jack was born in Belfast, Northern Ireland in 1923. Starting in 1941, while employed at the Belfast Corporation Transportation Department, Jack began his study of economics through evening classes, at Queens College. In 1946, having distinguished himself as the best evening student in the program, he was awarded a scholarship by the Belfast Co-Operative Society, enabling him to earn an Honors degree after one additional year of study. Because the honors classes were offered only during the day, he had to leave his post at the Corporation. But, because the scholarship was not sufficient to cover his living expenses, he had to take another job. He taught part-time at Belfast College of Technology, and one year later (1947) earned the degree of bachelor of commercial science with honors from Queens University.

The next year, he took his first full-time teaching position as lecturer in economic statistics in Bangor at the University College of North Wales. Soon thereafter, he enjoyed his first successes in publishing: one article testing various functional specifications for short- and long-run cost functions in electricity supply in the *Oxford Economic Papers* (1952) and the other commenting on Professor Kenneth Boulding's macroeconomic theory of distribution in the *Economic Journal* (1952). Although he had been promoted to a tenured lectureship in 1951 at Bangor, he accepted another position as lecturer in economic statistics in 1953 at the University of Manchester, where he would remain for the next four years.

There Jack's work flourished. His early research on cost functions secured a grant from the Houlton-Norman Fund of the Bank of England, which facilitated further work on cost functions, published in the *Manchester School of Economic and Social Studies* (1953) and the *Journal of Industrial Economics* (1956). Working his way through Professor M.G. Kendall's *Contribution to the Study of Oscillatory Time Series* prompted Jack to produce an article entitled, "A Revised Test for Systematic Oscillation," which Professor Kendall published in the *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society, Series B, Part II* (1954). When reading Professor Steindl's *Maturity and Stagnation in American Capitalism*, he discovered the apparent dilemma that classification of establishments in the Census of Publication by value added gave one relationship between labor productivity and size of establishment, while classification by number of workers gave a completely different relationship. Subsequently, he figured out a geometric method of resolving the conflict, resulting in another publication that appeared in the *Bulletin of the Oxford University Institute of Statistics* (1954). Finally, Jack developed a statistical test of whether linear models provide a reasonable representation of the real world, which he implemented using data from the Burns/Mitchell study of business cycles from the National Bureau of Economic Research. That paper appeared in the *Manchester School of Economic and Social Studies* (1955).

Jack was then offered a position at Harvard University — a standard five-year term as assistant professor of economics — to begin in the fall of 1957. By this time, he was married with two sons, but had no Ph.D.! He

nonetheless accepted the position, taking a two- year leave of absence from the University of Manchester. Before leaving the United Kingdom, he worked hard to complete the requirements for his doctoral degree at the University of Wales, which was awarded solely on the basis of a thesis. His five empirical journal publications on cost functions would serve as the heart of his thesis. He wrote, in addition, two introductory chapters — one on the theory of cost functions and another on the econometric issues involved in testing and estimation. He prepared a new penultimate chapter that summarized the findings of every empirical article he could find in the literature. The final chapter, entitled “A Critique of the Critiques,” was also new. In it, he investigated the various criticisms by Stigler, Friedman and others of empirical work on cost functions. His thesis was approved, and the degree was conferred in the summer of 1957.

Jack spent just one year at Harvard, 1957-58. The reason for the departure was a newly developed friendship with Guy H. Orcutt, who was leaving Harvard to establish a new interdisciplinary research program in quantitative economics at the University of Wisconsin Madison — a Social Systems Research Institute under Orcutt’s direction. Jack was offered a visiting associate professorship. Meanwhile he heard from Ely Devons, the Chair at Manchester, that he had been promoted to a senior lectureship.

During the 1958-59 academic year, Jack signed a contract with McGraw- Hill to write his first book, *Statistical Cost Analysis*, published in 1960. Before the end of the calendar year, the Economics Department had decided to offer Jack a full professorship to begin the next academic year. He was approached by two other U.S. universities as well as by a consultancy agency in New York. To complicate matters further, he was offered the chair of econometrics at the University of Manchester. In the end, Jack decided to return to the University of Manchester. His position there was the first chair of econometrics established in the United Kingdom. He was elected to the chair on its foundation in 1959, and was given the title of Stanley Jevons Professor in 1967.\*

Jack spent the next 18 years at Manchester, though he took various visiting positions, at City University (1967-68), Queens University (Canada, 1976-77), and Emory University (1977-78) during his tenure. In that time, he was very productive. In addition to publishing scholarly articles in the disciplines’ top journals such as the *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, the *Review of Economics and Statistics*, the *Journal of Economic History*, as well as the *Economic Journal*, he published the first edition and subsequently the second edition of his econometrics textbook, *Econometric Methods*. This was the first econometrics textbook ever written, and to this day remains one of the most popular on the market. It has been translated in four different languages. Indeed, records of the Institute for Scientific Information showed that, over a ten year period, this text was the second most frequently cited book in Economics and Econometrics, the first being Karl Marx’s *Das Kapital*. In 1963, he was elected Fellow of the Econometric Society.

In 1978 following his visiting position at Emory University, Jack decided to remain in the United States to take a position as professor of economics in the School of Social Sciences at the University of California, Irvine. Here he continued his scholarly pursuits. Although there was yet no graduate program when he arrived, he remained dedicated to the intellectual development of his students. Jack’s undergraduate econometrics course became the foundation of the Economics Honors program, and many of his students went on to pursue graduate studies. In 1983, he received the Distinguished Faculty Lecturer Award at UCI.

Jack was also very active in providing service to UCI. He served on search committees for three deans and was a member of many Academic Senate committees including the Committee on Research and the Planning and Budget Committee. In 1986, when the School of Social Sciences began the process of departmentalization, Jack became the first chairperson of the Department of Economics. After stepping down as chairperson in 1989, he remained an active member of the Department through his retirement in January 1993, and active in research beyond retirement.

The fourth edition of *Econometric Methods*, jointly written with Professor John DiNardo, was published in 1997. Newer content with a minor revision of his path breaking text, the fourth edition included many completely new chapters and major revisions of others. Although Jack remained skeptical about some of the more esoteric developments in modern econometrics, he nevertheless worked hard to master the material and make it accessible to many generations of economists.

David Brownstone  
Michelle R. Garfinkel

\* The early years to this point were taken from Chapters 4-6 of his unpublished Memories.