

EARLY MEMORIES OF JACK BLACKBURN

John Oliver Blackburn was born and grew up in Miami. Despite his aversion to cold northern weather, he came to Duke for his undergraduate work, finishing in 1951. He was in the CPA program, which, back in the days of the combined department, was the most demanding of our majors and required a large dose of economics. He was in the NROTC, so he had to put in two years of active duty after graduation. He could have qualified for a more prestigious university but picked the University of Florida for weather reasons. He was drawn to the interaction between economics and accounting and wrote his dissertation on the national balance sheet, the stock counterpart of the income and product accounts flows.

Jack was first hired in 1959 by Frank deVyver, chairman of the Duke Department of Economics and Business Administration. In his early days here he was an active party-giver (for which he was well known in later years). I recall meeting a number of his nearby neighbors, who happened to be junior members of the Duke religion and divinity school, in particular Tommy Langford and Hans Hillerbrand, who were later to become prominent Duke administrators. In 1961 Jack accepted a two year appointment at the American University of Beirut but had to return after only a year because of illnesses that plagued his family in the Middle East.

Sometime in the early 1960s the Southern Economic Association annual meetings were held in New Orleans. Jack and I were both drafted on short notice to serve as discussants on understaffed sessions. We decided to share a room, but because of our late registration we could not stay at the headquarters hotel but were sent to a fancy, distant, small hotel in the French Quarter. This area was all new to me, so Jack, who really knew all the restaurants, took me on quite a tour.

Before our building was renovated (in 1963-64, as I recall), you could tell after lunch whether Jack was in the building by the odor of an aromatic cigar that he enjoyed after lunch and, like incense, permeated everywhere. During the renovations we were mixed in with the Religion Department over in the Gray Building. I remember being with Jack over in Gray when the assassination of President Kennedy was announced and the chapel bells, outside the front window, started ringing. We got a lot of kidding about our being put with Religion. The next year they came back with us to our refurbished building while theirs was redone.

After their return from Beirut, the Blackburn clan acquired their Pineview Road home, where they engaged in memorable party-giving. An avid gardener, Jack had an unlimited supply of a vine (the name of which I cannot remember). He distributed many seedlings to the department with the promise that it would inundate their properties (I gave one to my parents, and it took over their carport).

In the mid-1960s a small but vocal right-wing faction in the department, chiefly John Magee and Simon Rottenberg, unsuccessfully attempted to block promotion and tenure

for four young "liberals," specifically Jack Blackburn, Juanita Kreps, Tom Naylor, and me. Neither Magee nor Rottenberg had a very productive career at Duke. Magee left for the University of Washington and its hunting and fishing amenities (he did some publishing there, on the virtues of monopolies). Rottenberg took his work on drug markets to the University of Massachusetts.

Jack's legendary abilities as an administrator were called into play in 1969 after Bob Smith's heart attack. Bob had succeeded Frank de Vyver, after Frank for a time tried to be both a university administrator and department chairman (I recall that he held office hours as chairman from 7 to 8 a.m. before going to the Allen Building). Bob got pressed into service on a university committee trying to deal with student unrest over racial matters and anti-Viet Nam war protests. The stress led to his heart attacks and death in the Spring of 1969. Jack took over and initiated a sequence of hires occasioned by a wave of retirements of people who had started at Duke in the early 1925-35 period.

William P. Yohe, Professor Emeritus