In Memoriam: Edwin D. Lawson

(1923–2021)

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A pillar of the American Name Society has died. Edwin D. Lawson passed away on July 3, 2021, at the age of 97. He was a strong supporter of ANS for many years in many ways.[1]

Ed Lawson was born Edwin David Levin, the son of Abraham and Anna Cooper Levin. In 1951, when he was a Ph.D. student at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign (UIUC), his advisor suggested that he change his surname because a Jewish surname might limit his academic career. That advice may have influenced his decision to be a scholar of personal names. Much of his onomastic research focused on how people react to names.

The three degrees that Ed earned from UIUC were all in psychology. He entered in the fall of 1942 as a freshman, but World War II interrupted his education after one semester. He joined the U.S. Army Air Corps and served in the Pacific Theater as a gunner on a B-29 bomber and flew thirty-five missions. One night, standing guard on the airfield on Saipan, a Japanese plane dropped a rocket bomb on the field and a splinter struck him on the heel. Although his injury was not serious, he had to be hospitalized. The next morning, his crew set out without him. They did not return.

Ed's experience as a crew member on a B-29 bomber led to his lifelong contact with other soldiers who had served on those planes through the 500th Bomb Group Memorial Association. One of his early onomastic essays examines the names that the crews gave to their planes (Lawson 1983a).

At UIUC, Ed met a fellow psychology student from Winnipeg, Irene Kentner. In 1949, they were married. Five years later, he completed his Ph.D. degree in psychology and took a position at SUNY Albany. In 1958, he went to Acadia University in Nova Scotia where he served as a professor of psychology and later head of the department. In 1967, he joined the faculty at SUNY Fredonia and remained there until he retired in 1989.

As a graduate student, Ed was influenced by Charles E. Osgood, who developed the concept of "Semantic Differential" to measure connotative meaning by asking respondents to choose a position between two
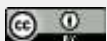
opposing words, such as excellent/poor, powerful/weak, kind/cruel, etc. His publications in his first few years of scholarship often focused on that concept, and his first onomastic article used it to study men's first names (Lawson 1971). Kelsie Harder, a former *Names* Editor-in-Chief, noticed the article and wrote to Ed about ANS. Ed subsequently joined the ANS and the majority of his onomastic research was published in its journal. Kelsie also asked Ed to edit a special issue devoted to names and the social sciences. That issue appeared in 1983 and included contributions from psychologists, psychiatrists, and sociologists (Lawson 1983b).

While evaluating manuscripts, Ed noticed that many authors seemed unaware of previous scholarship. This lack of awareness was understandable as there had been no published bibliography since 1952. He began systematically compiling and annotating articles on personal names, and in 1987 he published *Personal Names and Naming: An Annotated Bibliography*. That publication was then followed by *More Names and Naming* in 1995.[2] He also published specialized bibliographies of nicknames and Jewish names (Lawson 1990; Lawson 1997a).

Ed's interest in names was international. He worked with scholars in Israel and Jordan, and later with countries in the former Soviet Union, including Russia, Latvia, Lithuania, Georgia, and Azerbaijan. The resulting articles appeared in multiple onomastic journals. In addition to authoring more than twenty articles for *Names*, he also supplied over thirty book reviews on a variety of onomastic topics.

As impressive as it was, Ed's support of the American Name Society was not limited to scholarship. He was also a leader in the Society. A former ANS President (1995–1997), he was a key figure in moving ANS toward a more international focus (Lawson 1997b), and he played a role in updating the ANS Bylaws.

Ed's scholarly work slowed in his later years but did not stop. He was 90 when his co-authored book on West Siberian names came out, and he was at work on a book on Russian names when he died. On July 2, 2021, Ed Callary received an email from him which included this: "I'm still revising the ms. on Russian names. The APA style sheet is really a pain. Keeps me busy" (Callary 2021). He died the next day, six months short of his 98th birthday.

Edwin David Lawson was predeceased by his wife, Irene, and a son, Douglas Edwin Lawson. He is survived by his son, Robert George Lawson of Fredonia, New York; his son and daughter-in-law, David Allan Lawson and his wife, Lisa of New Milford, Connecticut, and two grandchildren.

Notes

[1] A Festschrift in honor of Edwin Lawson was published as a special issue of *Names* in 2007. The introduction includes a longer summary of his career and a list of onomastic publications up to 2007 (Gasque 2007).

[2] The 2003 issue of *Onoma*, the journal of the International Council of Onomastic Sciences (ICOS), also includes a bibliography from 1990 to 2003.

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