



Gordon H. Cowperthwaite



Born in London, England, in 1928, Gordon Hobbs Cowperthwaite started his articles with Peat, Marwick, Mitchell & Co. (PMM) in the London office when he was just 15. There was a break when he served in the British Army during the final years of World War II, and he obtained his CA designation from The Institute of Chartered Accountants of England & Wales in 1949. The following year he moved from the firm's audit stream to management consulting, and in 1953, he was transferred to the US firm to further develop his consulting skills.

In 1954 he immigrated to Canada, to start the management consulting division of PMM Canada — a challenging assignment for a 26-year-old! He managed this practice for the next 17 years, during which the name changed to Kates Peat Marwick Management Consulting. In 1963, he joined with nine other leaders of management consulting firms to found the Canadian Association of Management Consultants (CAMC), and in 1967, he served as its fifth chair. Those were challenging days: management consulting had to struggle to gain the respect it was seeking within the accounting profession. During this period, he chaired the Special Committee of the Canadian Institute of Chartered Accountants (CICA) to Assess the Impact of Electronic Data Processing on the Profession, whose report was published in 1967.

For ten years (1971 to 1981), he was the Canadian Managing Partner of Peat Marwick Mitchell, now KPMG. This was one of the eight largest accounting firms in Canada, with offices from coast to coast. The 1970s were a turbulent period in Canada: rampant inflation, sky-high interest rates, the OPEC oil crisis, and tax reform. Despite his heavy executive responsibilities, he found time to write chapters for books and articles for publication, mainly on EDP and computers; one of his articles received an award for the best article published in the *Canadian Chartered Accountant* magazine.

Also during the 1970s, he served four years on the board of the CICA, being President in 1977–78. At age 49, he must have been one of the youngest Presidents since the CICA was formed in 1902.

In addition, he became a founding board member of the International Federation of Accountants (IFAC) in 1977 and served as its President for two-and-a-half years from 1980 to 1982; he is the only Canadian to have held this office. At that time, IFAC had a membership of 73 accountancy bodies in 55 countries, and represented over 600,000 accountants worldwide; its challenges included “meeting the needs of increasingly global markets, supporting accountants in addressing ever more complex technical and business issues, and providing direction and institutional mechanism to keep accountants on the right ethical path... One of IFAC's primary roles was, and continues to be, bringing together professional accountancy organizations at varying levels of development to share resources, ideas and experiences for the benefit of the profession as a whole.”

Then in 1980, he became a founding member of the Canadian Audit and Accountability Foundation (CAAF; originally The Canadian Comprehensive Auditing Foundation), which was dedicated to promoting and strengthening public sector performance audit, oversight, and accountability in Canada and abroad through research, education, and knowledge sharing. He chaired the Foundation for the ten years 1983–93.

His involvement in the founding of three organizations — CAMC, IFAC, and CAAF — that were vital to the Canadian accounting profession, including one absolutely critical to the profession internationally, indicates the uniqueness of his contributions.

For the six years 1981–87, he was chair of Peat Marwick International, having oversight of the Peat Marwick operations in every country in which it operated around the globe.

During the 1980s and 1990s, he served on three for-profit boards: Tridel Construction, Great-West Life, and Sceptre Investments.

In 1993, he most generously funded the Gordon H. Cowperthwaite Accounting Education Centre in the University of Waterloo's School of Accountancy, with a \$500,000 donation. The objective of the Centre, which ran for ten years, included "the improvement of accounting education at UW and generating materials and methods that will be useful elsewhere in Canada"; it also supplemented the remuneration of the School's Gordon H. Cowperthwaite professor, Professor Howard Armitage, for ten years.

The fact that he was appointed to serve in key leadership roles in the foregoing organizations is an eloquent tribute to the esteem in which he was held, especially his executive abilities and interpersonal skills, both in Canada and internationally. But he was also honoured with specific recognition, including the following:

- In 1962, he was elected a Fellow of The Institute of Chartered Accountants of Ontario (ICAO), and then in 1989, he was accorded the rare honour of receiving the ICAO Award of Outstanding Merit — the highest honour the Institute can bestow.
- In 1978, he was awarded an honorary doctorate by McGill University, for his contributions to the Canadian and international accountancy professions. Since he never attended university himself, this must have been a source of particular satisfaction.
- In 1996, the 380-page text *Accountability, Performance Reporting, Comprehensive Audit — An Integrated Perspective* by Guy Leclerc, W. David Moynagh, Jean-Pierre Boisclair and Hugh R. Hanson was published by the Canadian Comprehensive Auditing Foundation, with the following dedication:

This book is dedicated to the genius and memory of the late
James J. Macdonell
CCAF's Founding Chairman (1980–83) whose intellect and energy
created the vision and pointed the way, and
Gordon H. Cowperthwaite
CCAF Chairman (1983–93) whose distinguished leadership sustained
the vision and added to it new dimension and significance, and
All those who have worked to create the body of knowledge and experience
which this book reflects.

- In 1997, he was the second recipient of the prestigious IFAC Robert Sempier Award, which recognizes outstanding contributions to the accountancy profession by an individual over many years, and is presented at the quadrennial World Congress of Accountants.

Gordon Cowperthwaite married Jean Sutton in London, England, in 1950; they had three sons. He died in 1998, at the early age of 69.