

# Dr. Anne Catherine Bezanson

Our finest exports from Pictou County have often been people who have gone on to excel in their fields of interest and employment. Many of these have been academics and of those, the majority were probably male.

However, on 28<sup>th</sup> February 1881 in Mount Dalhousie, Pictou County, a daughter named Anne Catherine Bezanson was born to John Allen Bezanson and his wife Sarah Jane Creighton and Anne Bezanson went on to become a university professor and an economist of note in the first half of the twentieth century.

An application for registration of birth in October of 1935 done by her mother Sarah Jane Bezanson then living in Sydney, Cape Breton, gives us these details about the birth of Anne. By the 1901 census, John and Sarah and their family of nine children, were living in the Upper Stewiack area of Colchester County, where John is listed as a farmer. Anne is then twenty years old – the oldest child in the household. Family research found online lists fourteen children for this family. By the 1920 American census for Pennsylvania at Bryn Mawr College Campus, we see a thirty-eight year old Anne Bezanson, an instructor at the college. In that entry it states that Anne had emigrated to the US in 1903.

A footnote in a doctoral thesis entitled *Joseph Willits, Anne Bezanson and Economic History 1939-1954* by C. de Rouvray for the London School of Economics and Political Science, notes that Anne Bezanson received her AB, AM (1915) in economics from Radcliffe College of Harvard University and her PhD in 1929 from Radcliffe and Harvard. Her note also states that Anne worked for the Gillette [sp.] Razor Company as a department manager from 1903 to 1911. It was 1921 when Anne combined with Willits to start the Industrial Research Department of Wharton College of the University of Pennsylvania and she headed this department from 1929 until 1945. In 1922 she and Willits had worked for the US Coal Commission studying the earning of coal miners. In 1929 she was made a full tenured professor at the University of Pennsylvania – the very first woman to have achieved this. In 1939 she joined with Willits at the Rockefeller Foundation to found the EHA [Economic History Association] as a part-time consultant and remained there until 1950. She was president of the EHA in 1946.

A history of the Gillette Razor Company does show that by 1903 Gillette had succeeded in producing a thin, shaving blade at a price which could be absorbed by the buying public and thus began the Gillette Company in the South Boston area although it had been active in other products in Boston before that time. From this information it seems logical to assume that Anne Bezanson had emigrated to the Boston area in 1903, gotten a job with Gillette, and then finding her talents were considerable, went on to enter Radcliffe College at Harvard University perhaps around 1911 when she ended her time with Gillette.

In 1910, the census enumerator for the people of Watertown Massachusetts shows Annie Bezanson as a twenty-eight year old single woman boarding with a Mason family and working with a cutlery company as an inspector. The Gillette company, well known for its

razors and other personal hygiene items, was for a period one of the largest producers of cutlery too.

Anne Catherine Bezanson excelled in a field at a time when it was a mostly male-dominated. She was the first woman to gain tenure as a full professor at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia. She was the recipient of several honorary degrees. In June of 1948, the University of British Columbia granted her the Degree of Doctor of Science, *honoris causa*. The presentation included the following "Anne Catherine Bezanson, a notable example of Canada's export of ability to the United States, who merits honour for patient and profound research in economics and for wise service in the cause of general education". Interestingly, the then president of UBC was Norman A. M. MacKenzie, who, although not born in Pictou County, lived many of his formative years in the community of Thorburn where his father Rev. J. A. MacKenzie was the minister of Union Presbyterian Church.

In June of 1951, Anne Bezanson was granted an honorary Doctor of Science degree from the University of Pennsylvania and the citation [supplied by her nephew Harold Bezanson] read as follows:

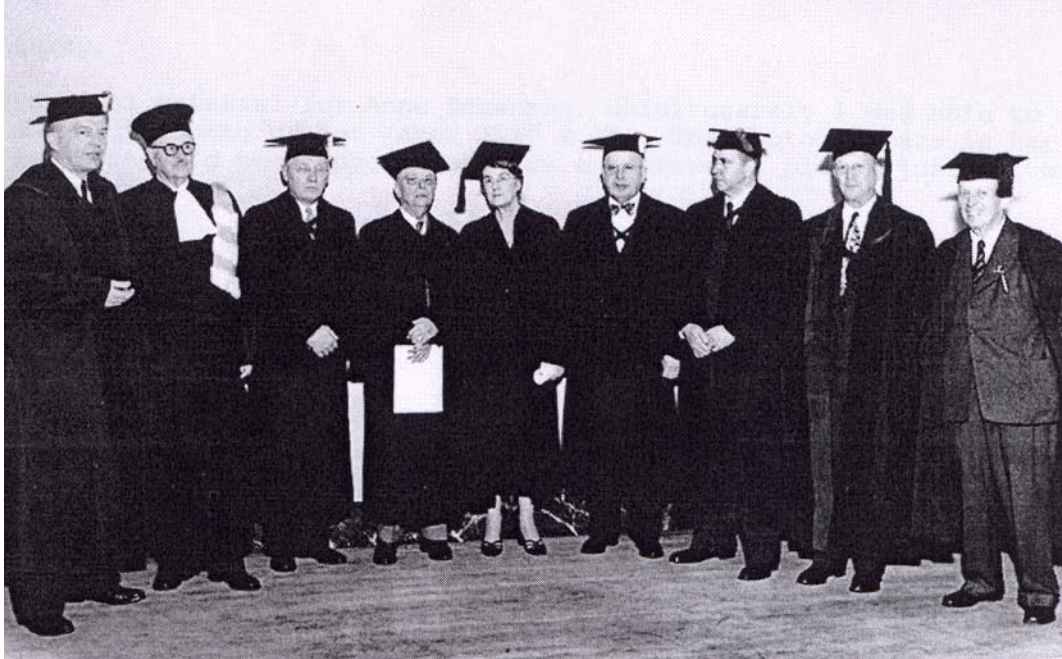
#### ANNE BEZANSON

Native of Canada and daughter of Radcliffe College--building upon a successful career as an industrial executive you have made unusual contributions as a research administrator, scholar, and teacher. Co-founder in 1921 and later director of the Industrial Research Department of the University of Pennsylvania, you pioneered in the development of organized team research in the social sciences. A student of price trends you have brought new knowledge of the business and industrial past out of which our great economy has evolved. One of the founders and later president in 1946 of the Economic History Association you have done much to stimulate new interest in economic history as a discipline and, in particular, to give encouragement to young scholars in the field. Your research has been equally skilled and penetrating, whether dealing with current industrial problems or reconstructing the business life of 18th century Philadelphia. But above all you have been a thought-provoking and sympathetic teacher and critic who has opened new vistas to students and colleagues alike, and for thirty years have given distinguished service to this University and to the field of scholarship in which you are a pioneer and a national figure.

Mr. President, I have the honor to present Anne Bezanson whom the Trustees wish to honor through the award of the degree of Doctor of Science.

This photograph which follows, supplied by Reference Librarian Sarah Hutcheon of the Schlesinger Library of Radcliffe College, appeared in a 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary report of Anne Bezanson's graduating class.





Another photograph circulating in the Internet is possibly originally supplied by a niece of Anne to de Rouvray who was researching Anne Bezanson for her thesis. It was purportedly from the 40s or 50s and shows Anne flanked by men probably during a university graduation ceremony of which she would have attended many in her years as a professor and as a recipient of honours.

This story began as a visit to a small cemetery in the Dalhousie Mountain area of Pictou County. An early spring day found me at Bezanson's Cemetery close by a lake of the same name.



Looking at the headstones there, the name Ebenezer Bezanson of Guysborough County appeared to have the earliest dates. Some research followed which showed Ebenezer

Bezanson and his wife Catherine Stewart were the parents of John Allen Bezanson whose marriage to Sarah Jane Creighton produced at least fourteen children, one of whom was Anne Catherine Bezanson born Dalhousie Mountain, 28 February 1881.



Local New Glasgow citizens and library patrons, Harold and Lana Bezanson, were then approached with a view to discussing the small cemetery and the history of the Bezanson family which records show go back to the incoming “Foreign Protestants” of Lunenburg in the mid-eighteenth century from the Montbeliard area on the border of France and Switzerland. The story of Anne Bezanson was told to me at that time and I felt more needed to be said publicly about this lady, born in rural Pictou County at a time when getting an education was for the few and but rarely for women. She travelled probably first for work to the Boston States and then to a university of prestigious quality. What made her decide to go to university or what person inspired her to do this? She was an inspector of cutlery at a local Gillette Company factory in 1910. And by the 1920 census, she was an instructor at Bryn Mawr College in Pennsylvania. What pushed her forward? She went on to obtain her AB [Bachelors], her AM [Masters] in 1915 and a decade or more later in 1929, her PhD [Doctorate] and these all from Radcliffe College and Harvard University. And then amazingly she remained in her field, teaching, researching, writing and influencing policy makers whether private or public.

She died at age ninety-eight on 4<sup>th</sup> February 1980 at a nursing home in Hanover, Plymouth, Massashusetts and was buried with her parents and other family members in the Riverside Cemetery of Upper Stewiacke, Nova Scotia. Her headstone gives her name, dates and states “Prof. Emer Univ. of Penn. Noted Economist”.



An eye-catching heading found on the Internet site for Bryn Mawr College which is probably meant to brand their past, current and prospective students is - “Strong Women, Smart Women”. This epitomizes Anne Catherine Bezanson, Economist.

For information and help, thank you goes to Harold and Lana Bezanson, to librarians at the University of Pennsylvania, especially Cathy Ogur, Lippincott Library, Wharton and most especially to Sarah Hutcheon at the Schlesinger Reference Library at Radcliffe College of Harvard University for the photograph of Anne and a link to the group photograph which includes Anne. The photo of Dr. Bezanson’s headstone was supplied by Harold Bezanson.