

Determining Karl Polanyi's Place in History and in Modern Day

Photo and story by Danielle Cawley

Professor Berkeley Fleming (Sociology/Anthropology) is working on an intellectual biography of 20th century social thinker and economic historian, Karl Polanyi. The seed for this book was planted while Prof. Fleming was on sabbatical last year. His original interest was to examine the impact of Polanyi's ideas on different disciplines, such as sociology and anthropology, and to explore why his works are better known in North America than in England. Once Prof. Fleming began his research at the Karl Polanyi Institute of Political Economy at Concordia University, however, his imagination was fired and the idea of writing a biography was born. He realized that a year's sabbatical would not be long enough to complete the necessary research, and therefore plans to work on the biography over the next five years.

The information he gathered during last year's sabbatical served as much more than the beginning for Prof. Fleming's book, however. First semester of this year saw him presenting a paper entitled "Karl Polanyi in England," to a conference at the University of Sussex. On campus, he was preparing a senior level course called "Sociological Theory: The Life and Work of Karl Polanyi," as well as presenting "Karl Polanyi in Red Vienna" and "Karl Polanyi and the Oxford Fabians," through Mount Allison's Works-In-Progress and Social Science seminars. Prof. Fleming kept momentum going on his research by exploring various themes with students in his Polanyi course. He also presented a paper at the Université Laval in late May on Polanyi's connection to the Christian Left in Austria and England in the 1930s. As well, he is slated to present at the *Eighth International Karl Polanyi Conference* in November, 2001, where he will explore the influence of other scholars on Polanyi's work. He continues to arrange interviews with Polanyi's relatives, friends, colleagues and students.

Prof. Fleming was first introduced to Polanyi's ideas in 1964 when, as an undergraduate student, he was required to read Polanyi's best known work; *The Great Transformation*. This book, published in 1944, has continuously been in print and has been translated into nine languages. Prof. Fleming argues that it is one of the most impor-

tant books of the 20th century, having an impact on such diverse fields as Anthropology, Economics, History, Classics and Sociology. The ideas intrigued him and Prof. Fleming made use of some arguments in his Masters' thesis on rental housing in Montreal. *The Great Transformation* showed up again in an introductory course he taught while pursuing doctoral studies. The fascination has grown as he has continued his research and made contact with other Polanyi scholars.

There has been a revival of interest in Karl Polanyi in recent years, and one of Prof. Fleming's projects is to demonstrate this through a citation analysis. He has recently received funding to do an analysis of the trends in citations of Polanyi since the early 1970s. By analyzing how many times he has been cited and what journals these citations come from, Prof. Fleming hopes to assess Polanyi's growing significance and varying impact in different disciplines.

Karl Polanyi has an interesting Canadian connection. He was a four-time emigré intellectual. Born in Vienna, Austria, Polanyi soon moved to Budapest in his father's home country. He later returned to Vienna, and from there went to London, England in late 1933. His next relocation was to Vermont and eventually New York, in the United States, with some time in England in between. Polanyi eventually moved to Pickering,



ON, where he lived for 14 years, commuting one week of the month to Columbia University. He was forced to live in Canada because his wife was barred from the United States as a result of her former political activities in Europe.

Intellectuals by the name of Polanyi are not restricted to Karl. His brother, Michael, was a widely-known academic. His nephew, John, won a Nobel Prize for Chemistry. Karl's daughter, Kari, was an economics professor for years at McGill University. Many of Karl's siblings, cousins, nieces and nephews have also distinguished themselves as intellectual or political figures. Prof. Fleming is currently working on a talk on the Polanyi family, to be presented to the Humanities Association in the fall.

Prof. Fleming's Polanyi collection, including Polanyi's books and articles, copies of much of his correspondence, notes Prof. Fleming has made, commentaries he has collected, family trees, maps and photographs of where Polanyi lived, takes up several shelves in his office. Though his research has taken a different direction than originally planned, he is excited about it and looks forward to its continuation and the eventual publication of Polanyi's biography.

Project Brings Archives, Fine Arts Together

A recent collaborative project involving Cheryl Ennals, University Archivist; Dr. Kevin Leonard (Anthropology), Prof. Jeff Burns (Fine Arts); and Fine Arts student Maskull Lasserre, has resulted in the creation of nearly 30 detailed drawings of regional historical artifacts from the Clara Dennis Collection.

The Archives initiated the Artifact Illustration Project so that important examples from this collection would be documented in archeological illustrations. Such drawings are often superior to photos, going beyond surface description to reveal the relationship of component parts, decorative elements, patterns of use, and the method of manufacture. Understanding of such features makes it possible to assign objects to particular periods, locations and cultures.

Maskull Lasserre created the drawings which will contribute to the use of the Clara Dennis Collection as a teaching collection and teaching aid for such fields as Anthropology, Archeology, Sociology, and Fine Arts. Funding/support for the project came from the Crake Foundation, the Archives, the Faculty of Social Sciences, the Department of Fine Arts, and the Senate Committee on Teaching and Learning.