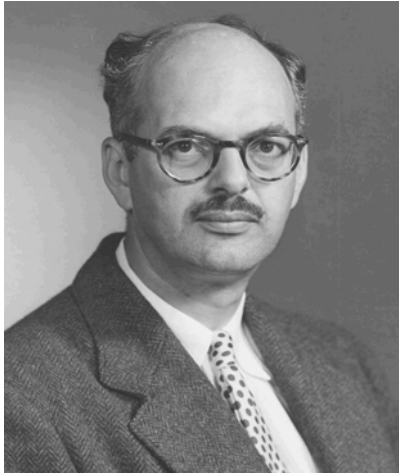


Nathan Keyfitz

Nathan Keyfitz, one of the giants of 20th century demography, was born on 29 June 1913 in Montreal, Canada. He graduated from McGill University with a degree in mathematics in 1934. He began working for Statistics Canada (then called the Dominion Bureau of Statistics) in 1936, where he remained for 23 years, working as a demographic statistician and rising to the rank of Assistant Dominion Statistician. After receiving his Ph.D. in Sociology in 1952 from the University of Chicago, he began a distinguished teaching career at the universities of Toronto (1959-1962), Montreal (1962-1963), Chicago (1963-1968), Berkeley (1968-1972), and finally Harvard (1972-1983), where he was Andelot Professor of Sociology and Demography and served terms as Chairman of the Department of Sociology as well Chairman of the Department of Public Health. Following his retirement from Harvard University, he spent 10 years at the International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis (IIASA) in Austria.



His ground-breaking work produced hundreds of books and articles in leading journals and developed the field of mathematical demography.

Keyfitz pioneered mathematical tools to study populations, embracing the use of computers in the 1960s to analyze demographic information, and he wrote the *Introduction to the Mathematics of Population* in 1968, a text that became a classic in demography.

Whenever you go to a meeting on formal demography or demographic methods, you can be sure that the path breaking and standard-setting work of Nathan Keyfitz will be mentioned many times. His work has become such a standard reference that researchers holding conflicting views will cite his work. Going far beyond formal demography, he made significant contributions to a wide field of demographic studies, ranging from population and biology to the reasons for low fertility, the effect of

immigration on population growth, the socioeconomic impacts of ageing, changes in international youth cohorts, and the effects of population growth on the environment. Beyond research, he contributed to the profession through a long and distinguished career in teaching, research, and institution-building in many countries in the Americas, Asia, and Europe.

This brief description of Nathan Keyfitz cannot set forth in great detail his enormously distinguished career as an innovative and influential demographer, a teacher and mentor to many, and a constructive role in several institutions. I first met Professor Keyfitz when he taught a summer course in mathematical demography at the University of Michigan in the early 1970s. Over the years, I met him regularly at professional meetings and occasionally sent him draft papers for comment. I can give witness to his exceptional kindness and encouragement to younger demographers. He was frank in his assessment, but always spotted some intellectual gem that he suggested needed further research. He was a delightful teacher, with an enthusiasm for new knowledge and ability to get students interested in further work in mathematical demography. He also had a wonderful spark of innocence. Following his afternoon summer seminars, several of us noticed that he did not walk directly back to his office. One afternoon, two of us tagged along with him before he remarked “you can join me if you want...I like to have a large ice cream cone after teaching.”

He was an exceptionally kind and humble gentleman. His broad vision and uncanny ability to grasp the essence of problems, his interest in mentoring younger colleagues, and his commitment to demography were impressive. He adhered to the highest scholarly standards, but generously gave a chance to those who shared his aspirations. He never lost his temper, but he did not suffer fools gladly.

My last interaction with Professor Keyfitz was a phone call to him in March, 2010, when I asked his permission to initiate a Nathan Keyfitz Book Award, to be awarded every two years by the Canadian Population Society. With typical humbleness, he gave permission but added “I am honoured but not sure that I have done so much for Canadian demography.”

He was the winner of numerous honorary awards and an elected fellow of professional associations including the U.S. National Academy of Sciences, Royal Statistical Society, American Statistical Association, and American Academy of Arts and Sciences. Along with Ronald Freedman

(2002) and Norman Ryder (2000), Nathan Keyfitz (1997) was one of three Canadian-origin demographers awarded the honour of International Union for the Scientific Study of Population laureate. He received seven honorary doctorates between 1972 and 1993 from Harvard University (1972), University of Western Ontario (1973), Université de Montréal (1984), McGill University (1984), University of Alberta (1984), University of Siena, Italy (1991), Carleton University (1993), and Université de Québec (1993).

Nathan Keyfitz died on April 6, 2010 at age 96 in Cambridge, Massachusetts. He had a wonderful 70-year marriage to the late Beatrice (Orkin) Keyfitz, and had two children, Barbara and Robert.

His papers and publications are stored in the Harvard University Library Archives. A list of his materials in the archives is available at: <http://oasis.lib.harvard.edu/oasis/deliver/~hua17002>.

Professor Keyfitz wrote an unpublished and incomplete autobiography, entitled *Notes of a Wayfarer*, the title suggested by his citation of three lines from Homer's *Ulysses*: "The cities of a world of nations/With all their manners, minds, and fashions/He saw and knew."

Barry Edmonston
University of Victoria
Victoria, British Columbia, Canada