

In Memory of James M. Buchanan
by
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It was my good fortune to have known James M. Buchanan (hereafter, "Jim") from several perspectives. For starters he was my professor and dissertation advisor at the University of Virginia over the period, 1966-1969. Other members of my dissertation committee were Roland McKean and James Waller. I still have a copy of the signed version, which was about the military draft. I have always been proud to be one of Jim's former students at Virginia, especially since it puts me in such good company. This includes (in no particular order) Charles Plott, Charles Goetz, Richard Wagner, Mark Pauly, Craig Stubblebine, Otto Davis, Matt Lindsay, and others that I am surely missing here.

After graduation Jim and I became co-editors and still later on co-authors. I remember well what it was like to work with Jim. There would be a casual discussion in my office during the afternoon when Jim roamed the halls in search of conversation. He would frequently get an inspiration or a new idea, and the next morning a typed draft of a paper (on yellow onionskin) would appear on my desk. The process was a little frustrating because when you read it, there were few improvements that you could make to what he had done.

We became colleagues when I took a position at Virginia Tech in 1977. Later on, after hiatuses at the Federal Trade Commission and Clemson University, I joined the Center for the Study of Public Choice and the Economics Department at George Mason University. I served there with Jim for 14 years. All told, Jim was a colleague on the same faculty for 17-18 years. These years featured low and high points. An example of the former was a bitter departmental struggle at Virginia Tech, which ended with the move of the Center to George Mason. And the high point, of course, would be the day in 1986 when Jim won the Nobel Prize in Economic Science. What a day. What a time. What a good feeling to bask in the afterglow of Jim's Nobel, fittingly the last Nobel to be tax free. I told Jim more than once that to have served as his colleague is an honor that I place before all others (not that there are so many that have come my way). As someone once said, he was an entire university in and of himself.

I also knew Jim as a friend. We watched sports and chopped wood together. We picked blackberries and made blackberry wine, which tasted like a bad port. We played poker with colleagues. I think

we had a clear understanding and feeling of kinship with one another. *The New York Times* piece about Jim's passing said that he was an austere man who put people and students off. This is a half-truth. For sure Jim did not suffer fools gladly. On the other hand, if Jim admitted you to the circle of people that he did not consider to be fools, you could not have had a better friend.

Lesser known perhaps, Jim loved animals. I was the recipient of several cats (including one named Morris) from Jim, and he graciously took a donkey from me that would not stay within my fences. The donkey, Isabel, was beloved by Jim, and on social occasions at his country place on Mount Tabor Road outside of Blacksburg, he would take the kids for a ride on Isabel. And, of course, there were the Jack Russell terriers, Brother and Sister, and all of the cats, which were treated to gourmet meals (cooked chicken livers) by Jim and his wife Ann.

Although he was born in rural Tennessee, Jim was not a country bumpkin. He was a sophisticated and cultivated man of the world, widely read outside of economics, and interested in all things intellectual, especially political philosophy, literature, and current events. He was a world traveler without peer, going abroad several times every year to lecture and visit colleagues and friends (like Peter Bernholz of Basel). Indeed, when he won the Nobel Prize, it is safe to say that he was much better known in Europe and Japan than he was in the United States.

Jim's legacy to scholarship is well known, and there is no need for me to comment on his work here. However, one aspect of his influence that may not be so obvious is his participation in the Southern Economic Association (SEA). Over many years (I estimate more than 50) Jim was an active participant in SEA meetings, organizing sessions, presenting papers, acting as a discussant, and serving as President of the SEA (1962-1963). In fact, his presidential address became a major contribution to the methodology of economic science. His participation in the SEA dates to a time when economists drove to the meetings rather than flew. And not only did he give papers, but he religiously went to other sessions and participated in panel discussions from the floor.

Jim was also a major contributor to the *Southern Economic Journal* (SEJ) over the course of his career. By a rough count, according to the version of his *curriculum vitae* published in his *Collected Works* (Volume 20), Jim published 10 papers in the SEJ from

1949 to 1998 (remember: Jim continued to publish after 1998, so there may be some SEJ papers that I have missed since I do not account for 14 plus years of his work). Among these are several widely known and cited papers. The SEJ was a major outlet for Jim's work, especially early in his career when he was getting started as a professional economist.

So along with fellow members of the SEA, I salute the life and times of a former President and active participant in our affairs. His great mind is now still, but he lives on in the ideas he passed on to his students, colleagues, and friends. It has been said that only poets and songwriters are immortal, but as an economist, Jim's work surely approaches immortality because it will continue to be read and discussed throughout time to come. We still read Adam Smith (at least some of us), and it is a good bet that over two hundred years from now, young scholars will pore over Jim's papers and books in search of ideas, insights, and inspiration. This may not be an eternity, but it is a very long half-life. Better yet, maybe some future political generation will see fit to put our fiscal house in order and in so doing pay homage to our memory of Jim Buchanan. RIP.