

# The Accounting Historians Notebook

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Volume 19  
Number 1 *Spring 1996*

Article 5

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1996

## Thomas J. Burns, 1923-1996; Professor of Accounting, Emeritus, The Ohio State University

Daniel L. Jensen

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### Recommended Citation

Jensen, Daniel L. (1996) "Thomas J. Burns, 1923-1996; Professor of Accounting, Emeritus, The Ohio State University," *The Accounting Historians Notebook*: Vol. 19 : No. 1 , Article 5.

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# THOMAS J. BURNS

1923-1996

Professor of Accounting, Emeritus

The Ohio State University

by

*Dan Jensen*

*The Ohio State University*

Tom Burns, former president of the Academy of Accounting Historians and former national president of Beta Alpha Psi, died on January 10, 1996, in Columbus, Ohio, following a brief illness. He retired from Ohio State University as Deloitte & Touche Professor of Accounting in 1994. Despite the limitations imposed by severe arthritis, he continued to come to his office twice each week to talk with students and colleagues



*Thomas J. Burns*

and to work on matters related to Beta Alpha Psi and The Accounting Hall of Fame.

Tom Burns was born in Arena, Wisconsin on April 6, 1923. Following high school, he served as a staff sergeant with the U.S. Army in Europe during World War II. He returned to Wisconsin in December, 1945, and studied accounting and American history at the University of Wisconsin, graduating with a BBA in 1950. Following graduation, Tom became controller for Lawrence University in Appleton, Wisconsin and, in 1952, became a CPA. In addition to the responsibilities of controller, the post included an opportunity to teach the beginning accounting course. In 1955, he entered the University of Michigan from which he received an MBA degree in 1957. Following a year on the accounting faculty at Southern Illinois University, he entered the University of Minnesota where he earned a

Ph.D. in accounting.

In 1963, he became Associate Professor of Accounting at The Ohio State University. During his second year at Ohio State, he received a leave of absence to serve as visiting Professor at Stanford University, the University of Chicago, and Harvard University. In 1974, he returned to California as a visiting Professor at the University of California-Berkeley. He spent the remainder of his academic career at Ohio

State where he was promoted to Professor of Accounting in 1967. He served as department chair from 1977 to 1981.

Tom Burns was totally dedicated to accounting education and to Ohio State's accounting students and programs. He founded the Accounting Honors Program in the late 1960s and served as its director until his retirement in 1994. Working with the Honors Program and the Omicron Chapter of Beta Alpha Psi, he molded an extraordinary educational experience for hundreds of accounting students, an experience that included regular participation in national and regional student seminars and manuscript contests. In 1966, Tom founded Ohio State's Accounting Research Colloquium which continues to meet every week during the academic year. In the early 1970s, he revitalized The Ohio State Accounting Hall

of Fame and served as its chair until his death in 1996.

In addition to papers in academic and professional journals, Tom's scholarly publishing included several books and many edited conference proceedings. Several of these proceedings were instrumental in raising the importance of behavioral and social phenomena in accounting research. He was a strong proponent of innovation in accounting education, and for nearly 30 years, McGraw-Hill published his *Accounting Trends*, an annual collection of newly developed course outlines.

Tom was a long-time member and supporter of The Academy of Accounting Historians and served on its committees. In 1992, Tom served as president of The Academy. He also served as a member of its Board of Trustees in 1977-79 and 1993-95. During his year as president, he sponsored a joint conference of The academy and The Accounting Hall of Fame that resulted in the publication of *U.S. Accounting History: 1965-1990, Proceedings of Accounting Hall of Fame Conference, An Oral History*. In recognition of his contributions to The Academy, he was awarded life membership in 1994.

Tom contributed to other professional organizations as well. He was national president of Beta Alpha Psi during 1978-1979, and from 1974 to 1981. He was a member of the National Council of Beta Alpha Psi and director of special projects. During this period, he was involved in the establishment of regional meetings, the creation of the National Student Seminar which was named in his honor and is held at

Ohio State in alternative years, and the establishment of the National Manuscript Contest. He was also instrumental in the location of the national office in Sarasota, the organization of continuing annual funding, the establishment of the National Advisory Forum, and the commissioning of the writing of a history of Beta Alpha Psi.

He served as Director of Education for the American Accounting Association, and the New Faculty Consortium was initiated and developed by Tom during his term, as was a biannual conference for Ph.D. program directors. He received honors and awards from virtually every organization in which he became involved. These many honors include the Outstanding Accounting Educator Awards from both the American Institute of CPAs (1989) and the American Accounting Association (1992). He was also the first recipient of the Ohio Outstanding Accounting Educator Award. In addition, he received distinguished service awards from the Columbus Chapters of the Financial Executives Institute and the Institute of Management Accountants.

Tom is survived by his sister and brother and their families and by hundreds of students throughout the country whose lives he influenced. A Thomas J. Burns Memorial Fund has been established at Ohio State University, the proceeds from which will be used to attract and recognize outstanding accounting students to the Fisher College of Business. Memorial contributions may be sent to the Department of Accounting and Management Information Systems, 1775 College Road, Columbus, Ohio, 43210.

#### THE ACCOUNTING HISTORIANS NOTEBOOK

Editor: Elliott L. Slocum  
School of Accountancy  
Georgia State University  
University Plaza  
Atlanta, Georgia 30303

Secretary: William D. Samson  
The Academy of Accounting Historians

Culverhouse School of Accountancy  
The University of Alabama  
Box 870220  
Tuscaloosa, Alabama 35487-0220

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<http://weatherhead.cwru.edu/Accounting>  
Webmaster: Gary J. Previts  
Case Western Reserve University