



# George Wilson McConkie IV

JUL 15, 1937 - APR 17, 2021



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# George Wilson McConkie IV

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**G**eorge Wilson McConkie IV passed away on April 17, 2021 after a courageous battle with Parkinson's Disease and cancer. He passed peacefully in his home at the age of 83 with his wife and children by his side. George was born in Holden, Millard County, Utah, on July 15, 1937 to George Wilson McConkie III and Mabel Stephenson McConkie. George served a mission for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in the Eastern States Mission, USA from 1957-1959. He married Orlene Carol Johnson September 6, 1962 in the Logan, Utah Temple of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. George earned his Master of Science degree from Brigham Young University and his PhD from Stanford University. He and his young family then moved to Ithaca, New York where George taught at Cornell University for 14 years. In 1978 he accepted a teaching position at the University of Illinois in Champaign-Urbana.

George excelled in his field of Educational Psychology and provided pioneering research on eye movement, cognition and reading. He became world renowned for his groundbreaking research. This grew into a position at the Beckman Institute for Advanced Science and Technology at the University of Illinois. Among the honors George received were his induction into the Reading Hall of Fame, appointment as Senior Scholar in the College of Education at the University of Illinois, the Outstanding Scientific Contribution to the Study of Reading Award, and a Fellowship from the Fulbright Scholar Program of Taiwan.

In addition to George's tremendous professional career he was also an active member in his church where he served as a Seminary Teacher, Bishop, Counselor in the Stake Presidency, Choir Director, Sunday School Teacher and more. George loved spending time with family, learning, music, fishing and poetry.

In addition to his loving wife, Orlene Johnson McConkie, he is survived by his fourteen children: Lynnette (David) Mooth, Heather (Bryan) Usevitch, April (John) Rhiner, Faline (Robert) Coffelt,



## Obituary

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Wilson (Alisa) McConkie, Bryce (Lynnette) McConkie, Camille (Dennis) Howard, Elissa McConkie, Esther (Chris) Ostler, Bryna (Lehland) Burton, Ruth (Joshua) Olson, Anna (Josh) Cooke, Cynthia (Timothy) Lau, Thomas (Emily) McConkie, 75 grandchildren, 22 great grandchildren, his siblings: Linda (Donald) Brady and Donna (Jon) Chamberlain. He is preceded in death by his parents, brother Paul (Sharon) McConkie, and grandchildren: Taeger Lau and Talitha Olson, and great-grandchild: Johnnie Bearden.

Funeral services will be held Monday, April 26, 2021, 1:00 PM at the Ensign Stake Center, 135 A Street, Salt Lake City, Utah 84103. Viewing hours will be 11-12:45 AM the same day. A streaming option is available at <https://zoom.us/j/98926248775>. In lieu of flowers, contributions can be made to your favorite charity.



## Tribute Wall

**George Wilson McConkie IV**

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AK

**Arthur Kramer** posted:

I knew Professor George McConkie first as a graduate student at the University of Illinois and later as a colleague at the Beckman Institute for Advanced Science and Technology. During my time as a graduate student, in the 1970's, George was a supportive mentor who taught me both the important theory and applications of observing eye movements as a window into human cognition and brain function. Later when I became a faculty member at the University of Illinois I had the opportunity and pleasure as serving as a Co-Director of the Human Computer Interaction research group with George at the Beckman Institute. I learned from George how to be an effective and supportive Co-Director of our many faculty and students at the Beckman Institute - and also had the opportunity to collaborate with George on a number of federal grants and research projects. I have been very fortunate that have had the opportunity to get to know and work with Professor George McConkie at the University of Illinois. RIP, my friend and colleague. Art Kramer

June 12 at 5:49 AM

TH

**Thomas** sent a virtual gift in honor of George.



February 1 at 3:53 AM

IP

**Ian Provo** posted:

I am submitting this entry several months after George's passing, as I recently ran across George's obituary. My thoughts and prayers go out to the McConkie family. I first met George, Orlene and his family in 1989 at a ward dance when I was a graduate student at the University of Illinois in Champaign. George and his wife knew my parents when they attended Stanford University. George was a great family patriarch. I admired his ability to be one of the top experts in his field and also my a good father to 14 children. I frequented the McConkie home on a regular basis during those years and I enjoyed my talks and discussions with George. My parents also offer their condolences to the entire family. Our belief in the Gospel and in the resurrection help carry us through these difficult losses. Someday we will all be reunited. I do miss my friendship with the McConkie family and wish them peace and blessings. Ian Provo-- Rockford, IL

September 24 at 10:26 AM



## Tribute Wall

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**Amber Barnes** posted:

What a wonderful Man Brother McConkie (is), always had a smile on my face and would ask me how I was doing, that made a difference in my life. I enjoyed coming over for a meal and how I love the whole family. He will be missed, but he is not done with his work he has more work to do in the next life. Prayers to the whole family during this time, everytime I see his picture on here it makes me smile.love Amber Barnes

April 26 at 8:16 AM



**Steve Craven** posted:

I was a new grad student at the University of Illinois, rooming with several other students who were also members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. We were at the Institute of Religion building one evening and one of the group said "We're going to Centennial High for graduation - are you coming with us?" So I went, and this was my introduction to George McConkie and his family (at that time with "only" 11 children. Even then, I was "adopted" into this amazing and warm, loving family. Spending evenings, holidays, dinners, with them kept the sense of homesickness at bay - and the sharing of music, literature, scripture, and fellowship - even over distance through all the years - has been an anchor for my life. George was always, always available to talk - and was endlessly interested in what was happening with me. But I can't honor George, without also honoring his family - they cannot be separated. And that, if nothing else, is the highest tribute I can give the man: the eternal connection of him with his family. We love you, George, and look forward to meeting, and socializing again, in the eternities. Steve

April 26 at 3:18 AM



## Tribute Wall

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CY

**Cynthia** shared a photo to the **Tribute Wall** album.

Dad, I am so glad I had you as my father! I have so many wonderful memories growing up. You were always so kind and patient with me. I remember when we went fishing and I caught a turtle by the tongue. I was a mess and was so sad. You gently helped me reach into the turtle, take the hook out of his tongue and then release him back in the water, while at the same time trying to help me stay calm and assure me that the turtle would be okay. I appreciate you coming to my new home in Kentucky and helping us paint and getting shelving up so we could get organized. When I got called to Mongolia for my mission I could see both the excitement and concern you had of sending me to 'outer Mongolia'. You were so patient bringing me to REI after REI and outdoors stores trying to find me the warmest socks and shoes to make sure your baby girl was well taken care of. On our drives between stores we had some good discussions and heart-to-heart. Thank you for being a wonderful example of a loving father and for always teaching us. Every moment with us was a teaching moment. I will miss our walks as you started to slow down. I will miss your wonderful hugs and great smile. I will miss the jelly beans always sitting in a jar on your desk. I will miss buying you red pens or seeing yellow sticky notes with your handwriting on them. I will miss bringing my children to see you and play their instruments for you. However, I am glad you are now reunited with your brother and parents and many of your grandchildren who will now get to know their grandfather who weren't able to while on this earth. Take care Dad and know that you are loved!



April 20 at 8:24 PM

RB

**Richard Bowman** posted:

I have the most indelible memory of the time George took our youth in Champaign to his reading lab and taught us about eye fixations. I got that feeling again at BYU in a phonetics lab. I appreciated the complexity of what he was teaching in a simple and approachable way to all us varied youth. What a measure of great teaching: indelibility. Then, he and Orlene came to my wedding to Sydney in August 1985 at the Lion House! Amazing connections! Thank you!

April 25 at 4:03 PM



## Tribute Wall

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VS

**Vernon And Deeanne Scott** posted:

George was one of 4 roommates at our "Pink Palace" apartment at BYU. We had all returned from serving LDS missions and were very spiritual compared to most college age students. We knew how to have fun without having to get drunk or hold wild parties—our priorities were earning high grades and finding suitable mates. George and I pursued our doctorates, and then we wrote to each other during the decades we worked for large universities. I was impressed by his ability to raise such a large family and still stay focused on his multiple research interests, enough to be of renown in his field. The world has lost one of its best souls and our heart goes out to his family and his kind wife, Orlene. May the example of his life inspire his children to strive for worthy accomplishments. Vernon and DeeAnne Scott

April 23 at 1:20 PM

FV

**Françoise Vitu** posted:

George McConkie was indeed an exceptional scientist, humble, honest, generous, meticulous, and inventive. I had the honor to work with him for several years, first as a postdoc, and then as a visiting researcher at the Beckman Institute in Urbana-Champaign. We collaborated and stayed in contact for many years, and it was a great pleasure for me to last organize a symposium in his honor at ECEM 2011, here in Marseille, and allow him to get together with several of his former Phd students and postdocs, and many of his friends. Unfortunately, this is when we last saw each other. It would take too long to list all the things I learned from working with George, but he certainly did inspire me a lot; he helped me putting all my ideas together and making them grow, always reminding me to see the other side of things. George also contributed to make me grow personally by teaching me wisdom, simplicity, and humbleness. George is a huge loss for our community. However, his unmissable and incommensurable contribution to vision, eye-movement, and reading research will make him eternal. And we will always remember the gentleman he was. Françoise Vitu

April 23 at 8:38 AM



## Tribute Wall

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**Lynnette Mooth** posted:

How I will miss my beloved father!! How great a vacancy he leaves in his absence!! How can you measure the good such a man has had on your own life and the lives of so many!? He was a wonderful father who was excellent at making learning fun. Education was of tremendous importance to him and he used every opportunity to teach us. In fact, our fun times were rarely without clear educational benefits and lessons. Dinner time often came with a lesson or educational conversation attached. I remember maps on the wall in the dining room and discussions on the Vietnam War, and drills on logical reasoning equations. When driving in the car he explained the inner workings of the engine or braking systems. Sunday nights were set aside for family home evening with lessons on our family history or study of great books of religious thought. He was a master teacher, and what's more, he could teach eloquently on the mental or emotional level of any audience, young or old, educated or simple. While I loved hearing him teach . . . usually . . . it wasn't until I had my own children that I more fully appreciated the time, focus & and effort it must have taken for him to dedicate so much time to our education. I cannot thank him enough for this!! His influence has had immeasurable influence on the home David & I have created for our own little ones. Besides the learning, dad taught me by example how to live a Christ-like, service filled, upstanding life which keeps me striving to do more, strive more & lift more. His attention to detail, his allegiance to duty, his creative thought, and unending pursuit of excellence have given me a lifetime of material to strive for. But mostly, I will miss my father's loving and wise counsel. So many times I have called him for counsel and wisdom beyond my own which counsel has guided my efforts in paths that always brought increased joy and success. I will miss my wise counselor, my exemplar, my father. Dad, I hope you know how much you are loved & just how much you will be missed! May your next adventure be so blessed! ❤️🌸  
❤️🌸❤️

April 20 at 8:24 PM



**Anne Fisher** May 2 at 9:43 AM

My husband, Jim Fisher, had a wonderful experience with Brother McConkie's parents and siblings. He came from good stock! Jim loved the family and was accepted and loved by them. I have been blessed to read some of these tributes to a good and great man - George McConkie Anne Fisher - May 2, 2021.



**Lester Loschky** posted:

George will be remembered for a long time for his contributions to the study of reading, visual cognition, and the critical role played by eye movements in both. His career spanned roughly 30 years. In the mid 1970s, George and his graduate student Keith Rayner developed the gaze-contingent methodology and measures of the perceptual span in reading, and their results revolutionized our understanding of the process of reading. They showed that readers of English extract information asymmetrically around the point of fixation, from 8-12 letters to the right of fixation, and 4-6 to the left, or, more generally, from the upcoming word to the right. Further work by George, Keith, and their colleagues and students, used this methodology to further delineate precisely what sorts of information the reader is able to pick up from the to-be-fixated word. In the 1980s, together with his graduate students David Zola and Gary Wolverton, George showed that the theory of the visual integrative buffer could not explain perceptual continuity across fixations. George showed that by having people read text written in alternating upper and lower case letters, and gaze-contingently changing the case of every letter, each time readers made a saccade. This complete change of all perceptual information in the text across fixations did not cause the predicted catastrophic disruption of reading. Readers didn't notice the perceptual changes across fixations at all, suggesting that rather than letter shapes being carried across saccades, it was identity information. In the 1990s, George then decided to test the same idea with scenes, by changing pairs of photographs that differed in key details (e.g., in a photo of two men, swapping their heads). He made those changes during viewers' saccades, and asked them to press a button if they noticed any changes. To everyone's surprise, many people completely missed the changes for long periods of time. When George's graduate student John Grimes presented their results at a Cognitive Science conference in Vancouver, a low-tech demonstration during the talk caused a great stir among the audience. From that work, the phenomenon later to be named "Change Blindness" was born. George and graduate student Chris Curry followed that up by making important contributions to our understanding of perceptual stability across saccades by showing that one could move an entire scene image, or the entire scene background, during a viewer's saccade, without the movement being detected, so long as the target of the saccade was not moved. This suggested that the saccade target has a special status in maintaining visual stability across saccades. Towards the end of his career, George and graduate student Shunnan Yang also caused a stir in the community by showing that for a moderate population of relatively short duration fixations, the recognizability of a fixated word seemed to play no role in determining readers' fixation durations. They showed that by having people read pages of text, and occasionally, for a single eye fixation, changing all of the letters on the page to random letters (among other various manipulations). They found that for fixations George also influenced a much larger group of graduate students, post-docs, and colleagues, around the world, from the US, to Europe, and China. He played a key role in generating greater interest in using eye movements to study perceptual and cognitive processes. George was always a soft spoken, kind, and patient mentor, colleague, and friend. He was also an important and caring member of his religious community, which was always very important to him. And most importantly to him, he was a devoted father, grandfather, and great grandfather to a large and loving family. George will be sadly missed by all who knew him. -Les



# Tribute Wall

## George Wilson McConkie IV

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LL

April 20 at 8:24 PM

EM

**Elissa Mcconkie** posted:

Hey dad, I just wanted to tell you how much I love you and what an honor it has been to spend so much time with you over the past 4 years while you lived in Salt Lake and over the last 18 or so months while we spent Thursdays and dinners together. I LOVED being with you. I know it was frustrating to you as your mind and body did not cooperate and were less able to do the things you wanted to do. I know there was so much more you hoped to accomplish. I loved our walks, our talks, listening to talks (educational and spiritual), watching movies, reading, making cookies, trying new foods, playing games, recording your personal history, sorting through your research and making sure everything was available online, reconnecting you to old friends and SO MUCH MORE! My time with you was time well spent. I can't thank God enough for the opportunity to be your daughter and to have so much time with you. Thank you for all you taught me over the years, for never considering me a lost cause, for believing in me and for praying for my success in life and in eternity. It's because of you and mom that I am who and where I am today. You never gave up on me! Thank you. I love you. I'm not sure how I'll spend my Thursdays now, or my evenings, but rest assured I'll keep an eye on mom and make sure she is cared for. You provided so well for her. I'm looking forward to feeling you near and seeing you again in person. Thank you for blessing me with a legacy of faith in God, habits of prayer, scripture study and meditation and the knowledge that I can return to God's presence and be together with my family forever, not just till deal do we part. I'll see you soon dad. Be near me, please.

April 22 at 3:48 PM

KA

**Kingsley Allan** posted:

My goodness what a loving mentor Bro McConkie was to me, and what a loving upright family he headed. I have been blessed and I look forward to sneaking into McConkie reunions for eternity.

April 22 at 2:44 AM

DH

**Danni Huang** shared an album called **Memories Album**.



April 20 at 8:24 PM



## Tribute Wall

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JT

**Jeanette J. M. Tinney** posted:

I am so sorry for your loss. I remember George and Orlene as humble, loving, and dedicated to the Lord. The children were growing up so beautifully that I knew the good qualities I saw in Church were continuing 24/7 at home. That set a good example to me and others. Seeing a lovely Sister Missionary at the Washington Temple Visiting Center years later confirmed that to me. All that we endure in this life is just "temporary" and the future will be good! May the Lord bless and comfort you and your family while you endure . Jeanette Mix Tinney

April 21 at 1:57 PM

CW

**Claudia Reeder Walters** posted:

How we love the McConkies! It was such a gift to all of us in the Ithaca Branch, when they came to town. The influence of George and Orlene was felt in hundreds of ways and in thousands of lives. I'm so grateful for the example they set for me and the friendship they shared with my parents. Love and hugs to Orlene and all of the family.

April 21 at 8:42 AM

RM

**Roy & Diane Moore** posted:

I cannot find the words to adequately express our gratitude, admiration and love for the McConkie family. George and Orlene are such wonderful examples to all. We are thankful for the knowledge that we will see our loved ones again and be reunited with them. May you be blessed during this trying time and always. Roy & Diane Moore Lansing NY

April 21 at 3:28 AM

AM

**Albert Mesotten** posted:

A dear father , husband and good person ! So sad to miss him but so great to know he is blessed in his new environment with his other family and followers of Christ :-) Children, be good for your dear mother !

April 20 at 8:24 PM



## Media

**George Wilson McConkie IV**

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Cynthia shared a photo to the **Tribute Wall** album.

April 25 at 4:54 PM





## Media

## George Wilson McConkie IV

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Danni Huang shared 4 photos to the **Memories Album** album.

April 21 at 4:34 PM



George took us to Nauvoo in the summer of 2010



2012 Before we moved back to Taiwan



Our son first met George when we visited Champaign in 2015



We visited Champaign in 2015



## **Memories only last if you share them**

Join us in honoring George by contributing to a collection of shared memories.



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