

Remembering Isabel Crook, Canadian Expat and Educator, 1915-2023

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Canadian educator, anthropologist, Friendship Medal recipient, and longtime Beijing resident **Isabel Crook** passed away on Aug 20 at the age of 107.

Born to missionary parents in Chengdu in 1915, Crook earned her master's degree from the University of Toronto in 1938, before returning to China for anthropological study.



Crook posing for a Chinese travel document in 1940

It was after her return to China that she met her future husband, David, in 1940. After marrying in London, the pair returned to China again on behalf of the Communist Party of Great Britain in order to study land reform in the north of the country.

When their study had concluded, Isabel was asked to teach English at the Central Foreign Affairs School, which would eventually be reformed into Beijing Foreign Studies University (BFSU). Crook taught at the university for more than 70 years until her retirement in 1981.



Crook and some companions overlooking the Summer Palace in 1962

According to *Global Times*, Crook was awarded the title of “tenured professor emeritus” in 2007 by BFSU, as well as an honorary doctorate degree from the University of Toronto. She was honored with the Friendship Medal, the highest honor China can bestow on foreigners, at the Great Hall of the People in 2019.

Isabel’s sons have left a mark on China as well. Of her three sons, Carl Crook founded Montrose Fine Wines, which has since relocated to Hong Kong; and Michael Crook was one of the founders of the capital’s very own Western Academy of Beijing (WAB).

You can read more about Crook’s life and times in an interview conducted by *the Beijinger* in 2017 (<https://www.thebeijinger.com/blog/2017/02/07/interview-isabel-crook-anthropologist-teacher-and-educator>), as part of a series on Old China Hands in Beijing.