OBITUARIES

J. William Buchta

A noted physicist and educator, J. William Buchta, died in Washington, D. C., on 23 October after a brief illness. Since this retirement from the University of Minnesota in 1962, he had been executive secretary of the American Association of Physics Teachers and editor of *The Physics Teacher*, a journal he was instrumental in founding.

BUCHTA

Buchta was born on a farm near Osceola, Neb., in 1894. He received a bachelor's degree in electrical engineering in 1920 and a master's degree in physics in 1921 from the University of Nebraska. His PhD was awarded by the University of Minnesota in 1925, and he remained there to become professor and chairman of the physics department in 1938, a position he held until 1953.

Buchta took an early interest in science education and played an active part in establishing interdisciplinary programs at Minnesota. He became assistant dean for the senior division of the College of Science, Literature and the Arts in 1941 and associate dean for the entire college from 1953 until his retirement. His concern for the individual student led to his appointment as chairman of the committee guiding the University College, a special unit of the University, created to serve the needs of unusually able students whose goals crossed conventional college lines. He was active in establishing the liberal-arts honors program at Minnesota.

In the late 1940's, Buchta was elected president of the American Association of Physics Teachers, filling the post from 1948 to 1950. From 1953 to 1956 and again from 1958 to 1961, he served on the Governing Board of the American Institute of Physics. During his career he sat on numerous committees sponsored or cosponsored by the AIP and contributed broadly to the improvement of physics teaching at the national level. He was assistant editor of *The Physical Review* and *Reviews of Modern Physics* for many years and acting editor of both journals from 1942 to 1945. From 1949 to 1957, he was editor of *Reviews of Modern Physics*. He was awarded the AAPT's Oersted Medal in 1958 and was a fellow of the American Physical Society, the Optical Society of America and the Acoustical Society of America.

He spent the year 1954-55 as executive secretary of the National Science Foundation's Advisory Committee on Government-University Relationships, and for five years he was the chairman of the AAAS Committee on the Teaching of Science and Mathematics. He was active in establishing summer institutes for high school and college teachers and was the director of one of the first summer institutes sponsored by the National Science Foundation. He was a pioneer in helping establish the Visiting Scientist Program of the AIP.

Long before Sputnik I, Buchta was concerned about the state of high-school physics teaching and, to get first-hand experience, actually taught a class for two years in the University High School. His concern led naturally to the establishment of *The Physics Teacher*, a journal intended primarily for the high-school teacher and student. He was active in the creation of the *Teacher Recognition Program* to recognize competency in secondary-school physics teachers.

An appreciation of Buchta's stature and the warm regard with which he was held by his colleagues can be gained from the very apt concluding remarks made by Walter Michels when, at the joint meeting of the American Association of Physics Teachers and the American Physical Society, he presented him to Vern Eaton, president of the AAPT, for the Oersted Medal. "One could go on for a long time in discussing Professor Buchta's achievements, but those who know him best also know that no mere catalog of accomplishments could give anything like a complete picture of the man. His warmth, his deep intellectual honesty, his understanding of human problems, his willingness to work whenever asked to do so in a worthwhile cause—these characteristics would qualify him for recognition even if he had never succeeded in his efforts. I believe it was you, Mr. President, who once said, 'Jay's greatest source of trouble is his inability to say "No".' He has given unsparingly of his time, of his apparently unlimited energy, and of his great intellectual ability; everyone in this room has benefited from his gifts."

Alfred O. C. Nier
University of Minnesota

Peter J. W. Debye

Physical chemist and Nobel laureate Peter J. W. Debye died on 2 November in Ithaca, N.Y. He had joined the chemistry faculty of Cornell University 26 years earlier.

Debye was born in Maastricht, the Netherlands, in 1884. He studied electrical engineering at the University of Aachen, where he first became interested in physics through the influence of Max Wien and Arnold Sommerfeld. When Sommerfeld went to Munich to assume the chair of theoretical physics, Debye accompanied him on a lectureship. He presented his doctoral thesis (radiation pressure on spheres of arbitrary electrical properties) in 1908, and was appointed Privat-Dozent at Munich in 1910. A year later he went to Zurich to succeed Albert Einstein as professor of theoreti-