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tium [On the revolutions of the heavenly spheres]. Currently, Swerdlow is writing the first volume of an introductory history of mathematical astronomy from Ptolemy to Copernicus. (The second volume will cover the period from Kepler to Newton.)

Swerdlow received a BA in music and history from the University of California, Los Angeles in 1964, and an MA in music in 1967 and a PhD in medieval studies in 1968, both from Yale.

—MATTHEW SIEGEL

AAPT TOP HONORS AWARDED TO FRENCH AND BIRGENEAU

At its joint winter meeting with The American Physical Society in San Francisco, the American Association of Physics Teachers presented a full complement of awards and honors. The Oersted Medal, AAPT's highest honor, was presented to Anthony P. French of MIT. Robert J. Birgeneau, also of MIT, delivered the 48th Richtmyer Memorial Lecture; five distinguished service citations were given; and AAPT members who received US Presidential awards for excellence in science and mathematics teaching were publicly recognized at the meeting.

According to the Oersted Medal citation, French's well-known series of introductory textbooks "played a role similar to that of the Feynman lectures—buttressing the level of understanding of the teachers in preparation for instructing their students." Before coming to MIT in 1962, French was a nuclear physicist with strong interests in undergraduate education and the history of physics. He arrived at MIT on an invitation to spend a semester at the newly created science teaching center. When the semester ended, French accepted an offer to remain at MIT working on science education.

In his early years at MIT the main objective for French and his col-

leagues was to infuse the undergraduate program—which then consisted almost entirely of classical physics—with atomic physics, quantum mechanics and relativity. He wrote a series of textbooks: *Special Relativity* (W. W. Norton and Co., 1968), *Newtonian Mechanics* (Norton, 1971), *Vibrations and Waves* (Norton, 1971), and *Introduction to Quantum Physics* (Norton, 1978, co-authored with Edwin F. Taylor). These books, he feels, did a good job of filling the voids that he had identified in the undergraduate physics curriculum.

French is currently "going to bat again," trying to reinvigorate the freshman curriculum, which has begun to suffer from some of the same problems as it did in the early 1960s. As he noted in his acceptance address, "there seems to be a relentless tendency for curriculum innovations to decay exponentially." He also discussed the merits of teaching physics from a historical perspective and of creating undergraduate curricula that are truer to "our current picture of the physical world."

French received his BA from the University of Cambridge in 1942. After work in the Cavendish Laboratory and with the British Mission to Los Alamos during World War II, he completed his PhD in physics at

Anthony P. French



Robert J. Birgeneau

