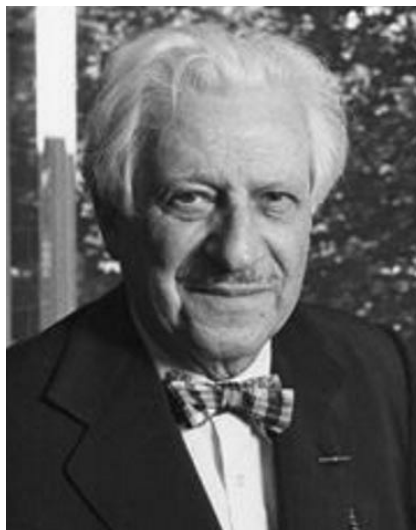


his caution”—surely just as descriptive of a good scientist. He probably enjoyed, even more than the toast, the senior faculty chorus that serenaded him, this time à la “When I Was a Lad” from *HMS Pinafore*, ending with the refrain:

His cold chambers had such
frigidity
That now he is the ruler of the
Faculty.

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New York City*



I. Bernard Cohen

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Noted historian of science and Harvard University professor emeritus I. Bernard Cohen died on 20 June 2003 at his home in Waltham, Massachusetts. He arrived at Harvard as a freshman in 1933 and spent the remainder of his career there.

Born on 1 March 1914 in New York City, Cohen received a BS in mathematics in 1937 and a PhD in the history of science in 1947; his was the first doctorate to be granted in that field in the US. In 1942, he joined Harvard's teaching staff as an instructor in physics.

All of his life Cohen spoke with reverence of the Harvard College where he had found an intellectual home. Year after year, he taught courses in the history of science as part of Harvard's general education (later core) program. He was a true showman who recognized the affinities of lecture hall and stage and was a master of the impressive demonstration experiment and dramatically told story. He used slides liberally to introduce students to both the visual and textual sides of science. Although his students might soon have forgotten the technicalities of Johannes Kepler's laws of planetary motion or Benjamin Franklin's two-fluid theory of electricity, once the course was over, almost all came away cherishing some striking anecdote they had first heard in Cohen's mellifluous baritone.

Cohen's graduate seminars covered a wide range of literature, both orthodox and heterodox. His broad curiosity was matched by his generosity. As he grew older, his scholarly openness to new topics and approaches only expanded; repeatedly, young scholars gratefully received his encouragement for projects rejected as too radical by other éminence grises. The heart of Cohen's scholarly world,

and his teaching, was Widener W, his library study. Weighty tomes filled floor-to-ceiling cases and spilled out onto paper-strewn desks and tables. A prolific author, Cohen often had several books simultaneously in progress, and each surface in his study was the site of a different project. Pride of place went to a lecternlike desk, where he wrote, standing up, with a thick fountain pen. In Widener W, Cohen taught by example the fine art of finding order in chaos—whether by forging a historical interpretation out of a swarm of dates and details or by laying hands on some book or document resting on one of those crowded tables. There, generations of student assistants were initiated into the craft of scholarship: They put together bibliographies, checked footnotes, puzzled out translations, and deciphered knotty texts in centuries-old scripts.

The output of those labors was prodigious. Cohen was among the first scholars in the US to specialize in the history of science, and, for him, that was specialization enough. Although his best-known work centered on the physical sciences in the 17th and 18th centuries, his projects in Widener W ranged from the history of inoculation to the history of computers to the history of the natural sciences at Harvard College. His first book, which he edited, was *Benjamin Franklin's Experiments: A New Edition of Franklin's Experiments and Observations on Electricity* (Harvard U. Press, 1941); his last, *The Triumph of Numbers*, was dispatched to the publisher (W. W. Norton) shortly before his death and has not yet been published. Other books include *Franklin and Newton: An Inquiry Into Speculative Newtonian Experimental*

Science and Franklin's Work in Electricity as an Example Thereof (American Philosophical Society, 1956); *The Birth of a New Physics* (Anchor Books, 1960); *Introduction to Newton's "Principia"* (University Press, 1971); *The Newtonian Revolution* (Cambridge U. Press, 1980); and *Revolution in Science* (Belknap Press of Harvard U. Press, 1985).

It was primarily as a Newton scholar that Cohen established his international reputation. In collaboration with the philosopher and historian Alexandre Koyré and the Latinist Anne Whitman, he labored for more than a decade to produce a monumental variorum edition of Newton's *Principia* entitled *Philosophiae Naturalis Principia Mathematica*—that encompassed the third edition with variant readings (Harvard U. Press, 1972)—which was based on the original manuscript, the three published editions, and Newton's corrections and annotations. A new English translation of the *Principia* entitled *The Principia: Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy*, by Cohen and Whitman with the assistance of Julia Budenz, and prefaced by Cohen's indispensable guide to Newton's *Principia*, was published in 1999 (U. of Calif. Press). His general-audience account of Newton and the scientific revolution, *The Birth of a New Physics*, has been translated into many languages.

Cohen retired in 1984 as Victor S. Thomas Professor of the History of Science. During his long career, he held numerous offices, including the presidency of the US chapter of the History of Science Society (1961–62) and the International Union of the History and Philosophy of Science (1968–71). He also was vice president of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and of the American Association for the Advancement of Science. Cohen was awarded the History of Science Society's George Sarton Medal in 1974 and the society's Pfizer Prize in 1986.

It is a tribute to Cohen's broad intellectual interests and to his cosmopolitan outlook that his students teach at colleges and universities in numerous disciplines and in several countries. Fields that he pioneered single-handedly have now become flourishing specialties in their own right.

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