

obituaries

To notify the community about a colleague's death, subscribers can visit <http://www.physicstoday.org/obits>, where they can submit obituaries (up to 750 words), comments, and reminiscences. Each month recently posted material will be summarized here, in print. Select online obituaries will later appear in print.

Robert Thomas Beyer

A participant for more than 50 years in American Institute of Physics (AIP) and Acoustical Society of America (ASA) activities and Hazard Professor of Physics Emeritus at Brown University, Robert Thomas Beyer died 19 August 2008 in Providence, Rhode Island. After battling various serious ailments throughout his life, including multiple sclerosis and several bouts with rheumatic fever, Bob finally succumbed to congestive heart failure.

Bob was born 27 January 1920 in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. His mother died only a few weeks after his birth, leaving him to be raised by his aunt. Various ailments kept Bob from most of his high-school classes, but he nevertheless managed to attend Hofstra College and graduate in 1942 first in his class with an AB in mathematics. He earned his PhD in physics in 1945 at Cornell University, where he worked on a secret World War II project involving magnetic amplifiers.

Soon after receiving his PhD, Bob was hired by Brown University as an instructor in the physics department. He became a full professor in 1958, department chairman from 1968 to 1974, and Hazard Professor of Physics Emeritus in 1985. He taught all levels, from freshman physics through advanced graduate courses, while mentoring graduate students with their MS and PhD theses. His students knew him as a strict but kind and considerate taskmaster. He was especially gentle when given the unpleasant task of advising a student to drop out of the graduate program. He once recounted accidentally meeting a dropout on the street a year later. Upon greeting the ex-student with some embarrassment, Bob was assured that his advice was the best the ex-student could have received; he was now employed on Wall Street, earning several times what he might have as a physicist.

The early research projects under Bob's supervision at Brown were concerned mainly with ultrasonic properties of matter: the propagation velocities and absorption coefficients of



Robert Thomas Beyer

ultrasonic waves as a function of frequency in water and common organic liquids and in electrolytic solutions, suspensions, single crystals, condensed gases, and liquid metals. In the late 1950s, Bob and his students joined the growing field concerned with large-amplitude acoustic waves and nonlinear interactions between propagating waves. In addition to their theoretical work, they performed experiments to confirm their theoretical predictions, including the controversial predictions of Brown colleague Peter Westervelt.

Bob was a prolific writer. In addition to some 75 scientific papers and journal articles, some written jointly with graduate students, he wrote four textbooks, including *Nonlinear Acoustics* (Naval Ship Systems Command, 1975) and *Sounds of Our Times: Two Hundred Years of Acoustics* (AIP Press, 1999).

One of Bob's many talents was an exceptional facility with foreign languages. He was well versed not only in English literature but also in French, German, and Russian. He had read *Dr. Zhivago* and *Remembrance of Things Past* in their original Russian and French. That facility led to a second, parallel career: translating textbooks and various scientific journals from German and Russian into English. His journal translations began with the Russian *Journal*

of *Experimental and Theoretical Physics* and *Soviet Physics-Acoustics*. Bob served two years as editor of the English version of the *Chinese Journal of Physics*. He was part of AIP's translation program at the beginning and remained active in it for more than 50 years, performing translations and serving on the translation advisory board from 1955, including as chairman from 1957 to 1977, and on the board of translation editors from 1974.

In addition to his translation activities, Bob was a member of the AIP Governing Board for 24 years, from 1969 to 1993, and of its Executive Committee from 1974 to 1987 and 1990 to 1991. He was editor of AIP publications on acoustics and signal processing and a member of the AIP Publication Board and the committee of society treasurers. He was equally active in ASA, a charter Member Society of AIP, and served in many capacities, including Executive Council member, vice president, president, treasurer, and associate editor for book reviews. He received the society's Distinguished Service Citation in 1978 and its Gold Medal in 1984. He was a well-known participant in international acoustical activities; he became a member of the UN International Commission on Acoustics in 1975 and was its chairman from 1978 to 1984.

Bob's personality and writing style, including his occasional curmudgeonly side, are perhaps best conveyed by quoting him. In a 1993 letter to the AIP executive director and CEO, Bob wrote,

Ornery Bob is back in condition.

In discussing the selection of a new board chair, you wrote "AIP is fortunate to have had a succession of outstanding Board Chairs (including Richard Crane, Frederick Seitz, and Norman Ramsey

Recently posted death notices at <http://www.physicstoday.org/obits>:

George G. Shor Jr

8 June 1923 – 3 July 2009

David Franklin Hotz

1930 – 13 June 2009

Robert L. Stearns

28 July 1926 – 13 June 2009

Robert Powell Guertin

5 July 1939 – 12 June 2009

John McDowell Walsh

6 November 1923 – 9 March 2009

Joseph Kyame

1925 – 27 February 2009

Hilda Fleming

5 January 1914 – 27 January 2009

John Nicholas Scott

23 September 1916 – 19 January 2009

in recent memory)." What's the matter with Phil Morse? Was he some kind of klutz, or did the fact that he once served as President of the Acoustical Society of America condemn him to the dust heap? You see that ASA paranoia is still in good form.

At a farewell meeting honoring Hans Frauenfelder on his departure as AIP Governing Board chairman, Bob opened his remarks with

I feel in strange territory tonight. First, I went off the AIP Governing Board just before this meeting began, after some 24 years. . . . I have fought my battles against Hans, against Ken, and finally against the wishes of the majority of the Governing Board. I have been defeated and that war is over. I therefore feel I have something in common with those ancient chiefs of Gaul, who, having been conquered by Caesar, marched behind him at his triumph in Rome. Of course, after that triumph, the chiefs were executed. Perhaps my going off the Board is the modern equivalent.

Bob's presence in AIP and ASA activities continues to be missed. His stu-

dents knew him as a compassionate father figure who gave them all equal time, regardless of their ability; they felt they had benefited by his council, although they were unable to emulate his talent for telling stories and jokes. His colleagues were unanimous in admiring his knowledge of many languages, his general erudition, and his success in promoting international scientific cooperation.

Murray Strasberg
Naval Surface Warfare Center,
Carderock Division
West Bethesda, Maryland

John David North

A historian of astronomy, scientific instruments, and medieval physics, John David North died in Oxford, UK, on 31 October 2008 after a three-year battle with cancer.

Born on 19 May 1934, North spent most of his childhood in Yorkshire in northern England. He attended Batley Grammar School before entering Oxford University to read mathematics, and soon switched to politics, philosophy, and economics. Later he completed a degree in mathematics, physics, and astronomy at the Univer-

sity of London. North returned to Oxford for his doctorate, for which he explored the history and philosophy of theoretical cosmology in the early 20th century. His thesis was a pioneering and comprehensive work that gave due weight to the importance of philosophical issues for cosmology. It led in 1965 to his first book, *The Measure of the Universe* (Clarendon Press), which was reprinted in paperback in 1990 (Dover Publications) with a new introduction.

Between 1963 and 1968, North was a Nuffield Foundation fellow at Oxford. In 1968 he became librarian and assistant curator of the university's Museum of the History of Science. In that position he had daily contact with the museum's magnificent collection of scientific instruments. Those encounters strongly influenced his research directions.

North's exceptional abilities at "reading" the artifacts of medieval science, allied with a natural talent for languages, would prove crucial for much of his scholarship. One of his early interests was the career of Richard of Wallingford (1292-1336), an Oxford-trained mathematician and astronomer who became abbot of the great abbey of Saint Albans and, in North's opinion, was "the most original English scientist of the later middle ages." In 1976 North published

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