

Appreciation of John Heilbron
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Everyone knows *HSPS* was “John’s journal.” Indeed, it was his journal for more than twenty-five years. Whether we’re aware of it or not – anyone who knew him can still see his traces – we live within its outlines and respond to its call.

Historical Studies in the Physical ... now the Natural ... Sciences was launched by John’s cohort – led by the journal’s founder, the incomparable Russell McCormmach. When John became its editor in 1980, a decade in, he was determined to use it to shape the history of science. *HSPS* was not a repository for scholars seeking to make names for themselves. John intended to illuminate institutional settings – funding regimes – experimental techniques. To spur our ambition to attend rigorously to how the content of science connects to its societal setting. History of science has to *matter* in this world. And historians need to escape from the thrall of scientists’ narratives. They should broaden their languages, do comparisons. And write history well.

John edited with a vigor that matched his sense of this calling. He set high expectations and ran a lean team. He framed directions for the field through the articles he published: away from philosophy and antiquarianism, toward institutions, contexts, and funding. Just as much, he shaped the discipline through intense work on others’ manuscripts. While he kept the door open to long articles, his core commitments were clarity and concision, no jargon, no dissembling or gesturing, rigorous empirical anchoring and line-by-line argument.

In the mid-2000s, with the ongoing support of Diana Wear, John and I found our way to transition the journal again. John’s 2007 “Swansong” paid tribute to Russ McCormmach and nodded to a new editorial board “composed largely of people about the age Russ was when he invented *HSPS*.” We newcomers kept the style sheet, made small changes to the title and cover, and reshaped the editorial team. But *HSNS* remained a venue for good footnotes and longer articles. And it got the best shot I could see at staying true to John’s commitments, by means of mutual accountability, to hard-won historical knowledge.