

Farewell, John

Before sharing a few memories of John Heilbron, let me take a moment to express my sorrow at the recent passing of another Heilbron student, Robin Rider. Robin started in the Berkeley history of science group one or two years before me, so we spent much time sharing the fun and commiserating as well. She worked closely with John on projects; organizing the XVIIth International Congress of History of Science in 1985, for example. She will be missed, especially in Madison.

John, as we all know, was a towering presence in our field. His sharp intellect and succinct arguments shaped the minds and careers of many students, including me. I was in the Berkeley program from 1975 to 1987, during which time John served as my mentor, employer and second reader, roles that he carried out with characteristic rigor and precision.

I first met John a couple years before entering the graduate program in History at Berkeley, as an undergraduate summer school student. It is bracing to realize that was about 50 years ago! A physics major at UCLA, I made the mistake of taking a historiography class; Peter Reill, later Director of the Clark Library, taught the course and advised me to explore history of science. I transferred to UC Riverside to do that. My advisor at UCR, Ron Tobey, suggested that with my interest in the history of quantum physics, I should spend a summer in Berkeley and check out John Heilbron. I followed that advice, too.

John sometimes could be a bit gruff, but he was not at all that way during my summer there. He was welcoming and interesting. He sold me on working with him for my graduate studies. I had stints as his RA and TA, edited a few published bibliographies in the *Berkeley Papers in History of Science* series, and of course he filled my dissertation drafts with editorial marks, criticism, and advice.

My salient takeaway from John is that he taught me to write historically, as Hayden White put it. He was a demanding and incisive editor who helped me develop my style for communicating—no small feat as someone who came to graduate school with a tendency to write long-winded German sentences in English. His feedback was always incisive and constructive— at times blunt, at time humorous - and pushed me towards coherence and clarity. As my career developed in librarianship and collection curation, John stayed in touch. I heard from him at least annually about various bibliographic needs or his travels, communications that were warm and generous. I am sorry that I will no longer be able to look forward to finding out about his new projects.

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