
**Memorial Resolution of the Faculty of the University of Wisconsin-Madison
On the Death of Professor Emeritus Robert Siegfried**

Robert Siegfried, a pioneering historian of science, died at age 93 on September 2, 2014. In 1952, Siegfried was one of the first two students to earn a Ph.D. for work in the history of science at the University of Wisconsin, and he returned to the University in 1963 as a faculty member of the History of Science Department, where he taught for more than twenty years until retiring in the mid-1980s as professor emeritus. Before returning to Wisconsin, he taught at Boston University, University of Arkansas, and the University of Illinois. In 1957, he was a founding member of the Midwest Junto of the History of Science Society.

Siegfried's career as an historian of science began during the years after World War II when awareness that the world had entered the "atomic age" seemed to require a better understanding of the nature and importance of science in its historical and cultural contexts. The University of Wisconsin had established the country's first History of Science Department shortly before the war, and after the war the department became a leader in the field. As chairman of the History of Science Department from 1964 to 1975, Siegfried helped to guide the department's expansion with a keen sense of the significance of its mission. He is remembered by his colleagues for his qualities of honesty, openness, fairness, and mutual respect, which did much to determine the character and success of the department.

Bob's scholarly work focused upon the developments in the history of chemistry that culminated with John Dalton's atomic theory. His study of this period produced several seminal articles as well as his post-retirement *From Elements to Atoms. A History of Chemical Composition*. With the geologist Robert Dott, Siegfried made available an edition of Humphry Davy's 1805 geological lectures, and he also co-authored *Concepts in Physical Science*, a textbook. His courses probably covered a greater range of subjects than those of any other member of the department. His regular offerings included courses on the history of chemistry, science in the enlightenment, history of astronomy and cosmology, and "Newton, Darwin, and Freud." Reflecting the times, Siegfried and David Lindberg created an undergraduate course during the 1970s entitled "Pseudo-science and the Occult," which was taught jointly for a few years but was then continued by Siegfried himself. Siegfried believed that teaching was a critically important part of a professor's duties that was often undervalued.

Siegfried's Ph.D. at Wisconsin was awarded jointly by the History of Science and the Chemistry departments, and he remained committed to the idea that history of science was an interdisciplinary undertaking that required the insights of both scientists and historians. Science, itself, however, he believed was frequently misunderstood as a search for an ultimate "Truth." To the contrary, he argued, it was the openness of science to new ideas that distinguished it from dogmatism. Encapsulating his own views, he frequently declared that the epigram, "You shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free" could be better put as "You shall search for the truth and the search shall make you free." Siegfried's views on the nature of science animated his teaching, and also led to his involvement in public debates about parapsychology, the Bermuda Triangle, and, especially, Creationism. In Siegfried's view, the great merit of Darwinian evolution was simply that it "explained so much."

In politics, Siegfried was a Democrat and in religion he was a Unitarian. As a graduate student, Siegfried joined Madison's First Unitarian Society, and one of his most cherished memories was

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his role as a quarry-to-church “stone hauler” under the direction of Frank Lloyd Wright in the construction of Madison’s Wright-designed First Unitarian Society meeting house. After he returned to Madison as a professor, Siegfried rejoined the First Unitarian Society, which remained a center of his social life. For many years, he sang in the Unitarian Society choir. After retirement, and before the onset of Alzheimer’s disease, Siegfried volunteered at UW Hospital, taught Elderhostel classes, and was actively engaged in a variety of sports and hobbies. A celebration of Siegfried’s life was held at the First Unitarian Society Meeting House on May 2, 2015.

Robert Siegfried was born in Marietta, Ohio, on January 18, 1921 to Mary Crawford and Ernest Calvin Siegfried. His father, from whom Bob may have inherited an early taste for writing poetry, was a professor of English at Marietta College. Siegfried graduated from Marietta College and during World War II served as an instructor in flight and meteorology at the Glenview Naval Air Base. During the war, he married Rachel McCutchen, who was a laboratory technician in the Chemistry Department at the University of Oklahoma. Robert and Rachel Siegfried had four children: Margaret, Jean, John, and David. In 1974, Robert and Rachel separated and later divorced. In 1976, Robert Siegfried married Judith Richardson, a teacher. Robert was predeceased by his first wife, Rachel, and is survived by his second wife, Judy, and by his four children.

Members of the Memorial Committee

Victor L. Hilts (chair)

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