



Siegfried, Robert

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https://madison.com/news/local/obituaries/siegfried-robert/article_e51a7e18-21f0-5e12-9f74-153ccca926e7.html

MADISON - Robert Siegfried, age 93, passed away on Sept. 2, 2014. He was born on Jan. 18, 1921, in Columbus, Ohio, to Mary Crawford and Ernest Calvin Siegfried. He lived in Marietta, Ohio, through his undergraduate years at Marietta College.

Bob loved learning from his first day of school, participating in academic competitions through high school. In 1942, he interrupted graduate studies to enlist in the service in World War II. He was assigned to the Glenview Naval Air Base to teach pilots the principles of flight and meteorology. His last assignment was to learn Japanese at the Naval School of Oriental Language, Stillwater, Okla.

There, while a volunteer in the University Chemistry Department, he met Rachel McCutchen, a lab technician. They wed during the War, and then raised four children over their 29 year marriage. In 1974, they separated and later divorced.

After World War II, Bob entered a doctorate program at UW-Madison, earning the first Ph.D. in History of Science (jointly with the Department of Chemistry). Before returning to the History of Science Department in 1963, he taught at Boston University, University of Arkansas, and University of Illinois. A year after return to UW, he became department chair for a decade (minus a year of research in England).

During his UW tenure, he created nine courses, served on a dozen UW committees and published many articles and reviews. His primary focus was classroom teaching, but his commitment to the public understanding of science led him frequently to write and lecture for the lay-audience.

Bob valued science for its never-ending search for truth, any conclusion being temporary and a source of new questions. Various media found him a good "on-call" source on claims of "pseudo-science" and superstition.

While a graduate student, Bob found his lasting spiritual home in the First Unitarian Society, Madison. When members struggled in their decision to build a meeting house, Bob witnessed a powerful demonstration of democracy in decision-making. With no money to contribute, he became a quarry-to-church "stone hauler", working under the critical eye of architect Frank Lloyd Wright. Later, when Bob returned to Madison, he served on many committees and sang in the choir as long as vision allowed.

In 1976, he married Judith Richardson, a teacher. In the mid-eighties, they enjoyed Bob's opportunity to serve a year as director of the Jr. Year in England program at the University of Warwick.

Bob published several books: Concepts in Physical Science (co-authored); Humphry Davy on Geology: The 1805 Lectures for the General Audience, edited with UW Geology Professor Robert Dott; and From Elements to Atoms: A History of Chemical Composition.

In retirement, Bob continued many lifelong enjoyments: reading, writing, singing, games and home renovation projects. He taught Elderhostel classes, volunteered weekly at UW Hospital and especially liked to share his fresh baked bread. High energy sports of earlier times - running, crew, squash, tennis, and handball - gave way to cross-country skiing, and summer eve softball and volleyball with colleagues and students.