

## The Many Faces of the Friends of the Center

Love of history, a sense of responsibility and stewardship, and a sense of fun help define donors to the Center for History of Physics. While the common thread of a scientific career in physics, astronomy or associated sciences runs through the most dedicated Friends, each has their own story of why and when they realized they were interested in science history.



*Melba Phillips*

Because of the repeal of the estate tax, **Melba Phillips** had decided to send in her bequest earlier, while still living, to gain the full benefit of income tax deductions. “**I have always been interested in the history of physics,**” Melba commented in a recent telephone conversation. She explained that while she could not give a precise date when her interest became strong, she associated her love of history with the writing of *Classical Electricity and Magnetism*, the classic textbook that she co-authored with W. K. H. Panofsky and published in 1955. While writing about the discoveries that led up to Maxwell’s discovery of his equations, Melba was struck by the unique and beautiful way these laws were derived.

**Frank Edmondson** decided to provide a generous donation to the Center’s endowment campaign, **History that Matters**, through a bequest. Frank and his wife Margaret Russell Edmondson have also provided a yearly gift to the Center for the past twelve years. The project responsible for triggering Frank’s active involvement in preserving and documenting the history of astronomy had its origins in a letter written to him in 1964 by David L. Crawford, suggesting that the history of the Association of Universities for Research in Astronomy (AURA) and Kitt Peak National Observatory be recorded. About ten years later Arne Slettebak and W.A. Hiltner, AURA board members, approached Frank repeatedly, say-



*Left to right: D. Allan Bromley, Virginia Trimble, and Frank K. Edmondson, at the 40th anniversary celebration of the Niels Bohr Library. See more photos of the reception on the next page.*

ing, “Frank, you’ve been in this from the beginning, so why don’t you write down your recollections of the early history before you lose your memory.”

Although Frank’s original plan was to simply organize archival files and write commentaries, he quickly saw that more was necessary. “**Also, it soon became clear to me that I had a moral obligation to do this. The story was much too important, interesting, and complicated to put back in the files to gather more dust,**” Frank noted in the preface to his book, *AURA and Its US National Observatories*, published in 1997. Frank recently recounted in a telephone interview, “**I realized that I was the only living person left who could write this history in detail.**”



*John Armstrong*

**John Armstrong** became more aware of the Center while serving as Chair of the Governing Board of the American Institute of Physics. He has generously donated leadership gifts each year to the Center for the past few years. He attributes his interest in the history of physics to a specific teacher while he was at Harvard. “**The history of physics is a key part of the history of modern civilization,**” John comments. “**Those who know it best have a special responsibility to pre-**

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**serve it, and to help make it known. My own conviction on this point goes back to a course at Harvard taught by Phillip Franck, which dealt with the history of relativity.”**

**Virginia Trimble**, at a recent meeting and tour of the Center, mentioned that she regretted she did not have a tape-recording of any interview with her late husband, physicist Joseph Weber. She said that if the Center could find such an interview, she would give enough money to support a full interview with someone else—a not insignificant sum. The staff were able to search the Web-based catalog on the spot, and found among the Niels Bohr Library’s holdings a tape of an interview on Weber’s contributions to the discovery of masers and quantum electronics. Although the tape was short

and did not cover Weber’s pioneering work on gravitational radiation, Virginia paid with a flourish.

Virginia says that she gradually and accidentally began to read, write, and give talks on history of science after she made the somewhat unhappy discovery that **many things she had thought of as “current events” had become history**, including the discoveries of quasars, pulsars, and the cosmic microwave background. She has reached that even more senior point described by David Dewhirst (of the Institute of Astronomy, Cambridge UK) as, “You know you’re getting old when the apparatus you used for your PhD dissertation research turns up in a museum.” It was a spectrograph in his case, and a 40-pound photographic plate holder in hers.

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### **40th Anniversary for the Niels Bohr Library**



*Joe Anderson, Associate Director and Head of the Niels Bohr Library, giving a tour of the archives.*



*John Marburger, Presidential Science Advisor and Director of the Office of Science and Technology Policy.*

The Niels Bohr Library celebrated its 40th anniversary on April 5, 2002. The reception was held downstairs from the Library in the American Center for Physics. The Library became an arm for the Center for History of Physics after the Center was created as a division of the American Institute of Physics. In 1962, when the Library was opened, Robert Oppenheimer spoke about its value at a dedication ceremony. “The enterprises which are now under way,” he said, “and for which this room will serve as hearth, should make it possible, if there are serious students of the human predicament in the future, to know very much more about what has befallen us than we who are acting and living in it.”



*Spencer R. Weart, Director of the Center, introducing Presidential Science Advisor John Marburger.*

The Library is now a premier repository for books, oral history interviews and other materials documenting the history of modern physics, astronomy and geophysics.

## *Friends of the Center for History of Physics*



*Reception celebrating the 40th anniversary of the Niels Bohr Library.*



*Above, left to right:  
Lillian McDermott,  
Mark McDermott, and  
Robert Resnick.*



*Joan Warnow-Blewett reminiscing  
about the Library's early years.*

*Below, John S. Toll (L),  
and Bernard Khoury (R).*



*Above, Left to right:  
Ken Ford, Leonard  
Kuhi, and Arlo  
Landolt.*



*Robert Resnick*



*Left to right: Tom McIlrath, Gloria Lubkin, and D. Allan Bromley.*



*Left to right: Anthony Johnson, John Marburger,  
Rudolf Ludeke, and Ben Snavely.*

**CONGRATULATIONS** to two of our best Friends for their new history of physics books. Per Dahl, our indefatigable volunteer bibliographer with his wife Eleanor, published *From Nuclear Transmutation to Nuclear Fission 1932-1939*, and John Rigden, a member of the Executive Committee of the Friends, published *Hydrogen: The Essential Element*. (See Bibliography, p. 109)

### **New Way for Center to Accept Gifts of Appreciated Mutual Funds**

A donor has recently inaugurated a new type of donation to the Friends of the Center. One of the donor's mutual fund accounts had appreciated over the years. Rather than bear the tax burden of cashing out, the donor decided to perform charitable acts with shares of this fund, and is now using it to provide annual gifts to various organizations. The donor urged the Center to set up a special account to accept gifts of mutual funds. The American Institute of Physics agreed and created a new account to accept gifts of appreciated mutual funds in a manner similar to that of stocks. With the account now activated, the donor has recently inaugurated the 'Mutual Funds for Friends' donation. This differs from programs offered by many financial institutions to manage accounts for charitable gifts. A donor may now take a 'hands-on' approach, with certain restrictions, to initiate and make a donation using many common mutual funds from a wide variety of financial institutions. If you are interested in learning more about this type of donation, please contact our Development Office at 301-209-3006.

### **A Friend in Deed: Nancy Greenspan**

Nancy Greenspan, who describes her research on Max Born elsewhere in this Newsletter, has become a good friend and supporter of the History Center as well as a regular user of its Niels Bohr Library. She has generously shared information on sources that she has uncovered throughout her pursuit of Born materials, and she has recently made important contributions both to our equipment and our collections. While cleaning the garage she came across an old seven-inch reel-to-reel tape recorder that is still in good working order. Remembering Library staff talking about the precarious health of the Center's old tape player (most of our earliest oral histories were recorded on seven-inch reels) and the difficulty of finding a replacement, Nancy has kindly donated her machine to the Library, where it has been given a welcome home with our other vintage audiovisual equipment.

Earlier this year, Nancy was planning a research visit to London to meet with Max Born's son, Gustav Born, and to the University of Edinburgh, where the Max Born Papers are located. The papers are owned by the family, and Nancy told us about several boxes of family photos that were stored in Edinburgh. Through her good offices, Gustav Born generously agreed to select and send us some of the best images, and is allowing us to copy them for our Emilio Segrè Visual Archives. We received 80 photos showing Max Born and his colleagues and family. After we make copies we will return the originals, and make digital scans of our copies for the online visual archives catalog. All of us at the Center for History of Physics extend our sincere thanks to Nancy—and Gustav Born—for their generosity and thoughtfulness.

*Note: due to a technical error, some Friends were omitted from our last newsletter. The full list is available on our Web site at <http://www.aip.org/history/friends/donors.htm>.*

#### *Leaving a lasting legacy.*

**Please contact me regarding the following:**

- \_\_\_\_\_ I wish to make a pledge of support in 2002 to the Center.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I want to donate books, photographs, and other source materials to the Center.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I have expertise and time to give in assisting the Center's programs.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I wish to become part of the Legacy Circle with a planned gift.

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Address:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Phone:** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**E-mail:** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Mail to:** Center for History of Physics  
One Physics Ellipse  
College Park, MD 20740

Or Call: 301-209-3006 and ask for  
Natalie Quets, Development  
Or E-mail: [nquets@aip.org](mailto:nquets@aip.org)

*Becoming a part of a group who are doing what needs to be done.*

*Supporting something that I believe in.*

*The fine feeling of accomplishment.*