

Princeton University Physics Department Alumni letters

Oscar Dahms '48:

Of particular interest to me was the update on John Wheeler, which brought up many reminiscences. In 1944, after my first 5 months in the US Marines Corps (for which I had volunteered at age 18 when I attended the University of Chicago), I was transferred to Princeton in the Marine V-12 Officer Training program. I chose physics as my major and in my junior year Dr. John Wheeler was my advisor for my junior thesis. I fondly recall his gracious and patient attention to my assignment. Unfortunately, only years later I became aware of his standing in the scientific world.

I got in touch with Dr. Wheeler years later through my son, then a student at Texas A&M. Dr. Wheeler, then at U. Texas, gave a lecture at College Station. I sent my son a note which he took to Dr. Wheeler and he had the opportunity to meet with him after the lecture.

To finish the story, my Marine Corps career was cut short because of the atomic bomb. Because I was not eligible for discharge, I remained in the marines at Princeton until June 1946. I returned in the fall of 1946 as a civilian and graduated in physics in June 1947. From late 1945 through 1946, many of the faculty who had served in war research in other institutions were returning. I had classes taught by prominent physicists, such as Shenstone, Hamilton, Dicke, White and others. I also think I was the only Marine V-12 ever to major in physics.

Fred Geldon '68:

By the way, the newsletter hit more marks with me than you might expect. Not only did I do my senior thesis under the guidance of Jim Peebles (picture + story), and studied with John Archibald Wheeler (picture + story), but as a graduate student at Berkeley I worked with astrophysicist Mike Werner (lecturer on student field trip)!

George Hogeman, '38:

What I remember most about the physics department was the extraordinary way its superb faculty spanned both the ordinary and the advanced. On the ordinary end, Professor Cooke told us with a straight face that a thermocouple aimed at the canal on Washington Road could detect when a mule pulling a barge came along, by its body heat. At the advanced end, Professor Shenstone showed us Princeton very early cyclotron. One of the guest lecturers was Danish physicist Niels Bohr. Albert Einstein almost daily walked across campus from his home to Fine Hall. I still remember attending a seminar of about a dozen people, one being Einstein, who took an active part in the discussion.

Alan M. Kadin '74:

I just received the Princeton Physics News newsletter. This is the first since 1989? I hope I don't have to wait another 17 years for the next one!

Ulf Lindqwister:

Here is a funny story from my Jadwin days. You know all about John Nash by now. Back in the early to mid 1980's, I used to hang around the math/phy library a lot and ran into John a number of times. He seemed a bit strange, but was always very polite and I never learned his name. Later, I studied economics for my MBA and learned about Nash equilibrium (in Game Theory). Not until he won his Nobel prize and I saw his picture in the papers, did I connect all dots and realize this was the same person. Boy, I wish I had talked to him some more back then - oh well...

Dan Lipkin '49:

In the times of yore Prof. Wheeler was an important resource: any ``brilliant'' new theoretical idea had to be able to get past him, before he had any chance of being significant. With Don Hamilton, Bob Dicke, Eric Rodgers and George Reynolds gone, John Wheeler remains the lone sentinel of the great critical tradition at Princeton.

Sidney van den Bergh '50:

Nice to see that you still remember me after 56 years! Good to see recent snaps of John Wheeler and Jim Peebles. Sad to hear about Geo. T. Reynolds.

Don White:

The article on John Wheeler stimulates many warm memories. Perhaps first in my mind is when I went in to John's office for my French exam. He was working at his desk as usual, gave me something to read and translate, and continued with his work while I read. When I finished, he took back the French text, read a translation of it which brought out a quite different meaning from the one I had derived, and commented, 'Well, I might as well pass you. French is easy enough to learn if you ever have to use it.'