

## Some Reminiscences of George

George Thomas Trammell died this past Saturday, July 29 at the age of 94. George was a Professor of Physics at Rice from the fall of 1961 until his retirement from Rice in the fall of 1997 as an Emeritus Professor. George was a very gifted, creative theoretical physicist, working in the general area of condensed matter theory, but his interests were very broad. George received his PhD from Cornell University in 1950. At Cornell, George was one of Richard Feynman's first graduate students, later switching to Hans Bethe when Feynman decided to leave Cornell -- two Nobel laureates, a remarkable pedigree!

George's connection to Rice was very deep. George was born on February 5, 1923 in the east Texas town of Marshall, TX. As a teenager, George and his two sisters moved with their mom to Houston, first living in the Heights, and then just north of Rice Institute, where his mother ran a boarding house, primarily for Rice students. George entered Rice in the fall of 1940. He initially thought he would become a chemical engineer, but freshman chem lab quickly changed his mind, and he decided physics was much more interesting. The physics class only consisted of a handful of students, but it was a very talented class which, in addition to George, included Gerry Phillips, who later became director of the Bonner Nuclear Lab at Rice, and classmates Jimmy Terrill, Ward Wahling and Bill Walker who all went on to become physicists.

George said that freshman physics was taught by Claude Heaps, a talented teacher by all accounts, but that most of the upper level courses were taught by H. A. Wilson, who was recruited by President Lovett in 1912 to become the first chair of the physics department. One of George's many interesting stories occurred his sophomore year in the spring of 1942. Sophomore physics was taught by Professor Wilson, and the class mainly consisted of rowdy chemical engineering students, most of whom couldn't care less about physics, and spent much of their time launching paper airplanes in the cavernous Physics Lecture Hall while Professor Wilson had his back turned. One day while Professor Wilson was writing his lecture notes on the board, a paper airplane came looping down from above, and hit him on the head. Professor Wilson turned around, and in a clipped British accent said "Gentlemen, I won't stand for this, I'm not going to teach you anymore" And he walked out. George said at first, everyone thought "Great! No more class!" But after a few days, the physics students began to realize that they had a real problem on their hands. First, they wanted to be physics majors and needed the course. But furthermore, Professor Wilson taught almost all the junior and senior courses. So they formed a committee of George, Gerry and one or two other students, and went to Professor Wilson to apologize and petition him to continue teaching them. The result was that Professor Wilson continued teaching the physics majors on his own, while a graduate assistant took over the main course. The next two years, George said that Professor Wilson laid the foundation for their physics careers, teaching them from J. J. Thomson's lecture notes from Cambridge, working through the classic text "Introduction to Theoretical Physics" by Slater and Frank, and his senior year, with Professor Wilson in poor health, they went over to Professor Wilson's home, and he gave them lectures on general relativity. In the spring of 1944, just before George graduated, George asked Professor Wilson what he could do to further his physics education, and Professor Wilson