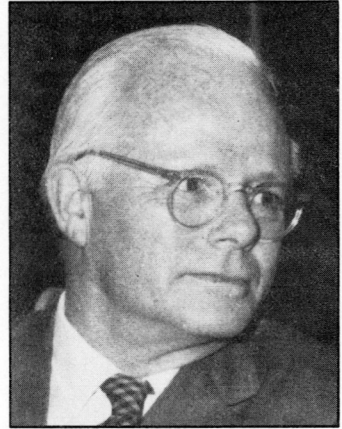


Memorial to John Brackett Hersey 1913–1992

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J. Brackett Hersey was born in Wolfeboro, New Hampshire, on August 20, 1913, son of Fred Edgar Hersey and Alice Brown Hersey. His early education was in the Wolfeboro grammar schools. In 1930 he graduated from Brewster Free Academy. He went on to Princeton University, receiving his A.B. in 1934 and M.A. in 1935, both in physics. As an undergraduate student, he worked as a recorder on a gravity party for the U.S. Coast and Geodetic Survey and as an observer on a seismic exploration crew for Phillips Petroleum. In 1941 he received his Ph.D. from Lehigh University, also in physics, with a minor in geology. While working as a graduate student instructor in geology at Lehigh, Hersey and others, several of whom would later become prominent in marine science, came under the influence of the oceanographic “maestro”—Maurice Ewing. From 1941 to 1944 Hersey was at the U.S. Naval Ordnance Laboratory; in 1944 he was commissioned in the U.S. Naval Reserve and served in the Pacific fleet in a mine modification unit, retiring in 1946 as a lieutenant.



Professor Ewing and his students were able to use Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution (WHOI) ships before and after World War II. This exposure lured Brackett and others to Woods Hole, where Director C.O'D. Iselin hired him in 1947 to run an underwater acoustic program. When the Department of Geology and Geophysics was organized in 1963, he was the first chairman. For the next three years he was also an adjunct professor of oceanography at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

In 1966 Hersey was granted a leave of absence from the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution to become deputy assistant oceanographer at the Office of Naval Research in Washington, D.C. At ONR he was responsible for the review of Navy-wide programs in ocean science to assure their quality and appropriate coverage to meet the future needs of the Navy. After retirement from ONR in 1979, he joined Science Applications International Corporation part time as a senior scientist, and he served until January 1990.

Hersey published more than 50 scientific journal articles, usually in collaboration with others. Subjects included solid earth geophysics, marine seismology, underwater acoustics, physical oceanography, sound scattering by marine animals, marine geology, and various applications of underwater acoustics to the study of the oceans and the sediments and rock beneath the oceans. Many of his early seismic refraction profiling efforts in the deep ocean were joint efforts with Maurice Ewing, then at Columbia University. Hersey's strong emphasis on sound transmission and seismic studies in both deep and shallow water resulted in new funding and instrumentation. He evolved a multidisciplinary project which included 50 individuals—physicists, geologists, biologists, acousticians, electronic engineers and technicians. He characteristically utilized the resulting technical improvements to reach a broader understanding of marine science.

Working with Roy Rather and Allyn Vine, Hersey pioneered development and use of towed instruments at sea. Of his several patents, the best known and most widely applied was the Continu-

ous Seismic Profiler for measurement of layered sediment structure beneath the ocean floor. He contributed many review chapters in scientific books on underwater acoustics, marine geophysics, marine animal acoustics, and oceanographic instrumentation, including seven chapters in *The Sea* (Interscience, New York).

Hersey sailed on most of the cruises supported by his project. At sea, he worked long hours in all types of weather. The *Bear*, a 100-foot-long former Army transport, was purchased for use almost exclusively for Hersey's work. In time, *Atlantis*, *Caryn*, and *Bear* proved too small in terms of work space, living space, range, and endurance. Together with his colleagues, Hersey was able to bring a much larger and more capable former Navy salvage vessel and associated funding to WHOI for oceanographic research. When R/V *Chain* arrived in Woods Hole in 1958, some scientists questioned its large size; the *Chain* was about 215 feet long and was an excellent working platform, with much improved laboratory and living space. It raised standards for research ships in the United States.

In the spring of 1963 when the nuclear submarine *Thresher* sank, Woods Hole ships joined other research ships searching for it. Hersey and many of his people used their towed bottom cameras and precision graphic recorder to assist. In later years Hersey continued to work closely with the operating Navy in their seagoing research efforts.

While at WHOI he served on many committees for the Navy, the National Science Foundation, the National Academy of Sciences, and the scientific community at large. His honors include the individual citation medal from the U.S. Navy in 1945. In 1964 the American Institute of Geonomy and Natural Resources awarded him the Fleming Medal "for outstanding accomplishment in science and human welfare." The citation, given by WHOI Director Columbus O'D. Iselin, stated that Hersey came to the institution as one of several individuals recommended by R. M. Field. Iselin also stated that he did not suspect how rapidly Brackett Hersey would build up geophysics at the WHOI laboratory. In 1970 the Department of the Navy awarded him the Distinguished Civilian Service Medal.

In 1968 Hersey resigned from WHOI because the Navy wished him to continue in Washington. He cited his strong ties of affection and many happy memories of his career at the institution and said that he felt a strong personal responsibility and interest in the scientific data he helped collect in his 21 years at Woods Hole. Although those data had served their original purpose, he felt that considerably more value could be obtained from the archived collection. From time to time he utilized the data as a visiting investigator.

J. Brackett Hersey was a Fellow of the Acoustical Society of America, the Geological Society of America, and the Royal Astronomical Society. He was also a member of the American Geophysical Union, the Society of Exploration Geophysicists, the Marine Technology Society, the Seismological Society of America, and the American Physical Society.

Brackett was an enthusiastic amateur musician, one of the original members of the Falmouth Town Band. He also played in the local Woods Hole Chowder and Marching Society Band, which welcomed ships returning from extended cruises. He and his wife Sally were heavily involved in a local Gilbert and Sullivan theater group, as well as in church and related activities.

In a 1988 Christmas greeting Brackett said, "I have pursued many interests in addition to science, sea-faring, and so on. Most of these pursuits tend to slip away with time, for various reasons.... A few new ones are added. Music, for example, has almost disappeared except as a casual spectator pursuit.... My other compelling activity is gardening.... Education and a war kept me from gardening until I settled down in Woods Hole (somewhat) and I've been at it ever since."

J. Brackett Hersey died November 4, 1992. He is survived by his wife Sally Magowan Hersey, son Cyrus Brackett, daughter Joslyn Helen, and granddaughter Joslyn C. Bender.

Sally Hersey has spearheaded plans for a memorial window in the Church of the Messiah in Woods Hole; its design will celebrate the lives of people who work in the ocean.

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