

In Memory of John C. McPherson

WE WERE VERY SADDENED to receive the word that John McPherson had passed away recently. You may recall seeing John on the cover of *APL Quote Quad* (Vol. 28, No. 2; December 1997) as the 1997 recipient of the Kenneth E. Iverson Award for distinguished achievement in APL. That same issue also featured an interview with John, highlighting some of his many achievements.

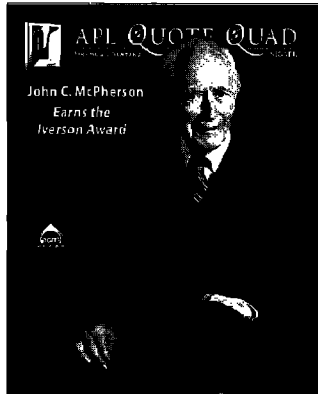
John McPherson, a retired IBM Vice-President, had long been a supporter of APL, often pushing for its support at the highest levels of IBM. A firm believer in what he preached, he was himself an active APL user from the time it was first created in the 1960's until this past year.

Here are some notes that were prepared by Bruce McPherson, John's son, for presentation at the memorial service at Christ Church in Short Hills, New Jersey:

LET ME BEGIN BY SAYING that Dad has lived a charmed life here in Short Hills, New Jersey. He grew up just two and one half blocks from Christ Church. His education became Short Hills Country Day School, Millburn High School, Hotchkiss, Princeton Engineering, and the Pennsylvania Railroad shops at Altoona.

At the Short Hills Club New Day's Reception in 1930, a neighbor from a block west of here, Thomas J. Watson [Sr.], asked Dad to come to work for him at International Business Machines.

The rest is history. Dad started in Newark, New Jersey, attended IBM Sales Class #56, and then did Hundred-Percent Club work serving as a special sales representative to the railroads. This led, in 1934, to a promotion to assistant manager of the transpor-



tation department in New York City. Shortly thereafter, Dad married his Wells College May Queen, Kay Roberts—Mom.

In 1940, Mr. Watson promoted Dad to manager of the Future Demands Department—an assignment to “cooperate with and co-ordinate the activities of the Engineering, Patent, Market Research, and Commercial Research departments. . . . The task was to think longer-range, beyond the modification of existing machines, to new ones,” to quote Emerson Pugh’s history. This was to become the essence of Dad’s work at IBM from then on. He became Director of Engineering in 1943.

Dad never served in uniform in WWII: he did duty as IBM’s contact for the U. S. Army Ordinance Corps Ballistic Laboratory in Aberdeen, Maryland. He arranged for Mr. Lake to build the fastest-ever relay calculator for the Ballistics Laboratory. He also served those who had specialized cryptographic needs.

It’s about this time that sister Betsy and I remember Mom’s and Dad’s help with our homework in the winters and walks on the beach in the summers. Dad helped me build a Chris Craft Sailing Pram, an insight that led to my career in yacht design.

Eventually, we acquired a Cape Cod Knockabout, which Dad and I raced religiously on weekends on Gardiner’s Bay.

But IBM’s demands grew. By 1950, Dad was Vice President of Engineering. These were the years that Dad fought for “electronics,” in a business-machine field that was still firmly convinced that mechanical relays were best. Dad persisted, and convinced them of the superiority of the new electronics . . . and you know the rest. There were many more uphill battles, however. Retired IBMer Helen Taft, who couldn’t get here from the Isle of Guernsey, wrote “I knew your father had his frustrations with those who controlled his budget and failed to support him in his advanced thinking.” Jon McGrew, who did get down from Kingston, New York, can tell you of some of the particulars of Dad’s many successes.

I’ve read a bit about IBM history these past few days. How Dad pushed transistors, a unified product line, and bigger and faster computers, were all expressed in a memorandum he wrote in February, 1960:

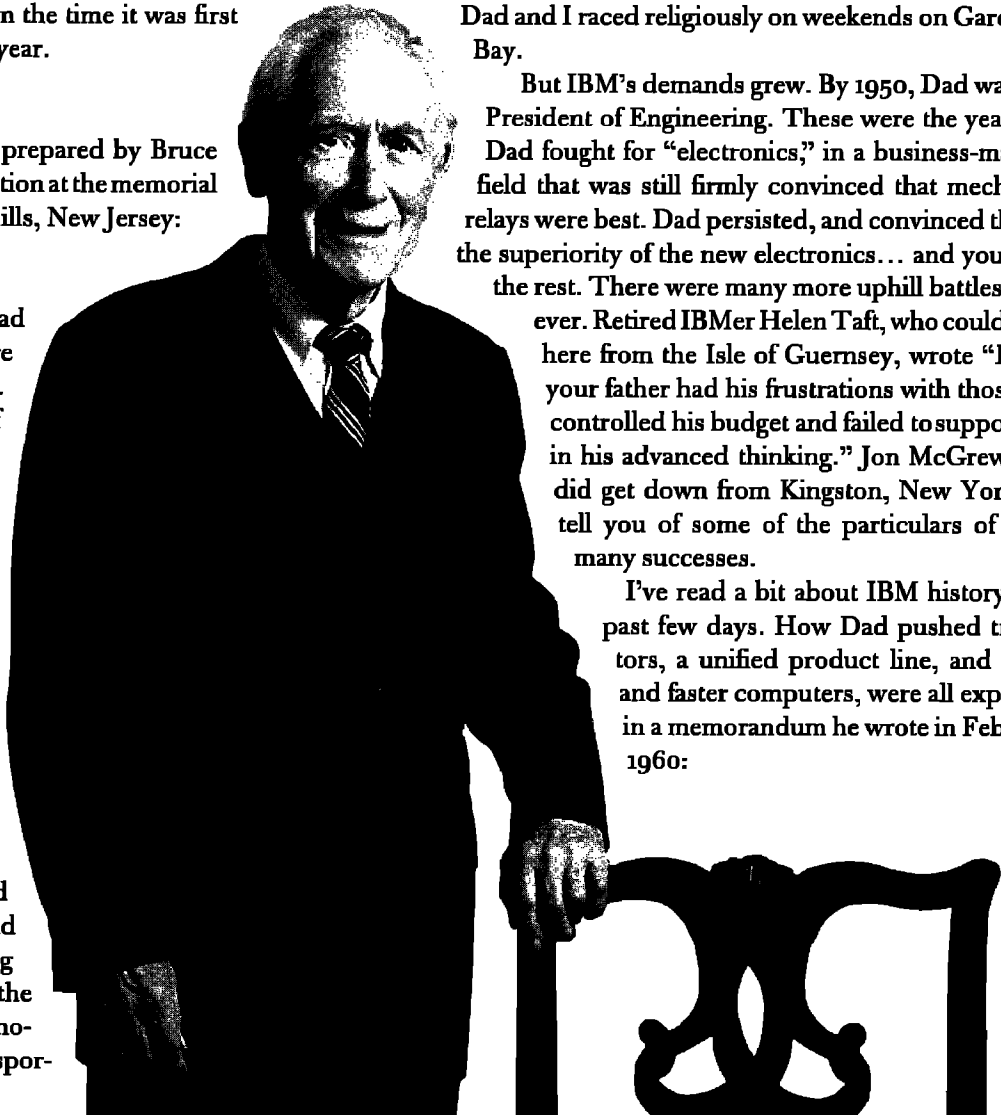


Photo taken for *APL Quote Quad* by Justin Bailer, Photographer, Bernardsville, New Jersey, 1997

"The amount of common knowledge which has to exist to use stored-program data-processing machines is so great that I feel we need a single system which makes a single community of all our customers. If all our customers today were able to interchange program information, the progress in programming would be even more rapid than it is, and our contributions to programming could be much more significant and more widely useful."

Dad's last ten years with IBM were spent serving as head of The Systems Research Institute—a graduate-level school within IBM which T. J. Watson had asked him to create—and as a member of The National Security Agency's Scientific Advisory Board. Even in his final years with IBM, he continued to promote his favorite computer language, APL. In his retirement, Dad worked nearly every day with APL for many years. Just yesterday, I found his notes in APL, exploring succinct ways to find endless prime numbers.

His most cherished award? Without a doubt, *The Kenneth E. Iverson Award for Outstanding Contribution to the Development and Application of APL*.

I understand that such a recounting as this is unusual in a church setting, but this is the world that Dad lived in, and perhaps it explains why he couldn't talk about what he did, even at home.

Dad was as sharp as a tack to the end. His eyes twinkled more with each passing year, even as his hearing and energy waned. He visited both Betsy and me for separate weeks this past summer, but seemed to realize that both trips would not be repeated.

I'd like to close by acknowledging a great debt of gratitude to Genny Pierson. After Mother died in 1991, Genny took over and ran Dad's house just as Mother had. Her efforts gave Dad long life with time and peace of mind to devote his efforts to his many worthwhile projects.

And so it was that Dad died in his sleep, with a serene smile over his face.... It was indeed a charmed and full life! ■

We extend our thanks to Bruce McPherson for providing us with this text regarding his Dad. He can be reached through the Quote Quad Editors. ... We will greatly miss John McPherson. He was indeed a gentleman.

People In the News:

Alex Morrow Named as IBM Fellow

NAPLES, FLORIDA, JUNE 10, 1999 — IBM announced that seven of its top scientists, researchers and developers have been named IBM Fellow, the company's most prestigious technical honor.

One of the new IBM Fellows may be known to many APLers: He is Alex Morrow, currently with IBM's Lotus Internet Applications Division. Earlier in his IBM career, Alex had been a member of the APL Design Group under Ken Iverson (a former IBM Fellow) and Adin Falkoff. He became well known to many APLers for his development work on APLSV.

First at IBM and later at Lotus, where he was named a Lotus Fellow, Morrow made significant contributions in fields ranging from programming languages and operating systems to software standards and personal computer software. His early achievements included his involvement in the establishment of an international standard for the APL language and the ACIS 4.2 operating system for IBM's first workstations. When the Open Software Foundation was created to produce a standard Unix operating system, Morrow became IBM's founding executive for this effort. More recently, he was a driving force behind the integration and unification of Lotus' product line and now is active in developing the next generation of "pervasive computing" technologies.

The new Fellows were recognized by IBM Chairman Louis V. Gerstner, Jr., at the company's annual Corporate Technical Recognition Event, held in Naples, Florida, on June 9th, 1999.

"With these honors, IBM celebrates sustained and distinguished technical achievements in engineering, programming and technology," said Nicholas Donofrio, senior vice president, technology and manufacturing. "This year's honorees reflect the spirit of technological innovation that drives IBM's research and development programs, and equally important, our ability to translate breakthrough technologies into products, services and solutions that dramatically impact the marketplace."

This year's new Fellows include some of the information technology industry's leading experts in storage, data management, microelectronics and high-end server technology. In addition, for the first time, three IBM Fellows were named from Lotus Development Corporation, an IBM subsidiary.

Since the program's launch in 1963, only 155 people have been appointed IBM Fellows, including five Nobel laureates. Only 52 active employees currently hold the honor. ■

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