

Henry Chessin 1919-1991

Early this year Henry Chessin passed away peacefully at his home in Albany, NY. Henry started life in a difficult way; he was an orphan at birth and spent most of his childhood moving from foster home to foster home. He shared with me at one time that, as a young teenager, he finally found a home in an orphanage and he spoke well of the kindness and love shown to him there. Always a New Yorker, he did his graduate work at Polytechnic Institute of New York (Brooklyn Poly) in the golden days of Fankuken, Harker, Ewald, Post, etc. It was in Brooklyn that he met his wife, Sylvia, who was to provide the family environment that he had never known. He worked for a number of years at US Steel; when the research group was curtailed in the early 1960's, he moved to Albany where he became a Professor in the Department of Physics.

Henry is best known for his momentous task of establishing, organizing, and sustaining the well known "SUNY X-RAY CLINICS." These clinics started in a very modest way in the mid 1960's with a single week for beginners in X-ray fluorescence, mainly for users of Siemens spectrometers. Henry developed a unique format of lectures, recitation, and laboratory sessions in order to cover the theoretical, practical, and experimental aspects of the technique. The teaching of this beginners' week was placed in the able hands of Dr. Eugene Bertin who, to this day, continues to do an outstanding job. About 1968, Henry approached me and asked if I would be interested in teaching an advanced week in X-ray fluorescence to supplement the already successful beginners' week. The advanced week was duly added in 1969. Professor Bob Gould of the University of Florida, Gainesville, organized the recitation sessions, and Professor Jim Brown of the University of Western Ontario, London, ably handled the laboratory sessions.

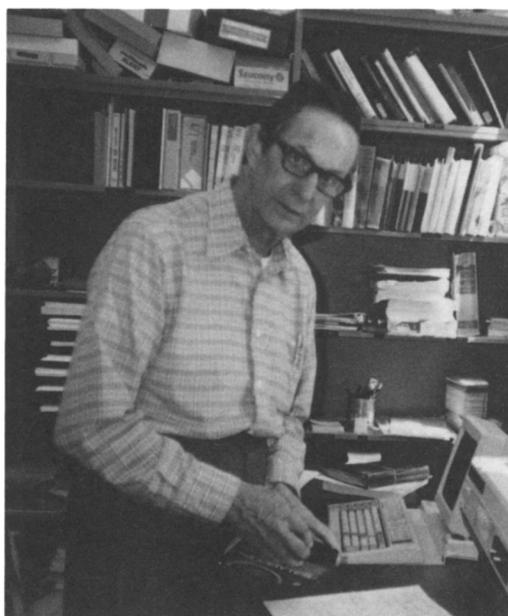
The success of the clinics grew rapidly and, in 1974, in response to popular demand, it was decided to add beginners'

and advanced weeks in powder diffraction. Thus each year, for the whole month of June, the Physics Department of the State University of New York at Albany became a hive of bustling activity, with equipment being installed and removed, with students coming and going, with coffee and doughnuts being consumed in vast quantities, and, through it all, Henry Chessin reigning supreme as master and whipping boy. It has been estimated that more than 2,000 students passed through the SUNY Clinics, a major achievement indeed when one considers that the total active population of powder diffraction and fluorescence people in the US and Canada is probably not more than 3,000 at any one time! Henry retired from the University in July 1989 and he decided that the 1989 Clinics would be the last to be held at Albany. By that time, Henry had already had two heart attacks and his doctor (and his wife) insisted that he really retire. The International Centre for Diffraction Data agreed to continue to organize the Clinics, and Henry agreed to assist the ICDD in relocating the Clinics to Swarthmore, PA.

Henry did not have too many interests beyond his work. He was, however, a gourmet cook, a fact attested to by the t-shirt that the Clinic staff presented to him some years ago, emblazoned with the logo, "At least I'm boss in the kitchen." At the time of his death he was working on a new X-ray fluorescence book with Gerry Lachance, a long time clinician. The Clinic staff recently presented a painting to Sylvia Chessin and I had the opportunity to sit with Sylvia for a few hours and reminisce about the early days of the Clinic. Sylvia told me that as soon as Henry retired and gave up the Clinics he seemed to lose interest in life. He died within two years of retirement.

In addition to his wife, Sylvia, Henry leaves two married daughters and a number of grandchildren. He will be sorely missed.

Ron Jenkins



Henry Chessin