

NECROLOGY



Irving Gordon Foster
“Iggy”
July 15, 1912 -- January 11, 2000

Iggy Foster was the Academy’s 32nd President (1954-55) and a former chair of its Astronomy, Mathematics and Physics Section. Born in Lynn, Massachusetts, he received his B.S. degree in Electrical Engineering from Virginia Military Institute in 1935 and a Master of Philosophy from the University of Wisconsin in 1937. He was a “Beams man”, receiving his Ph.D. from the University of Virginia in 1948. He was a member of Phi Beta Kappa and Sigma Xi. His teaching career began in 1937 at V.M.I. as Instructor of Physics with the rank of Captain, rising to Professor and Colonel in 1950, the first member of his department to hold a doctorate.

In research, he was a consultant to Honeywell and in 1951 he began a summer research program at V.M.I. doing contract work for the Harry Diamond Laboratories of the National Bureau of Standards. His contracts involved accelerometers and fuze timing mechanisms and for the next decade provided both “moonlighting” income and professional stimulation for undergraduate faculty in physics, mathematics and electrical engineering as well as for some Washington and Lee University faculty and led to the establishment of the V.M.I. Research Laboratories in 1963.

“The Ig”, as he was nicknamed by the Keydets of the fifties, was one of the chief architects of the physics major program initiated in 1949 and one of the primary influences in the design of Mallory Hall which has housed physics since 1952. In his classes he insisted on rigor and designed his course in theoretical physics to prepare

seniors for graduate school. In professional societies he was partial to both the Academy and the Southeastern Section of the American Physical Society where he served on the Executive Committee and as meeting chair. He attended both almost every year, serving as a role model for younger faculty and cadets in presenting papers and serving in various leadership capacities. Iggy was a deacon and later an elder in the Lexington Presbyterian Church and a regular teacher of the Stonewall Jackson Bible Class.

In 1960 he moved to St. Petersburg, Florida, to become a founding faculty member of Florida Presbyterian College, later named Eckerd College. In 1966-67 he was a Fulbright Fellow in Sri Lanka. He was a leader in the Florida Academy of Science and an active elder in the First Presbyterian Church of St. Petersburg, where his adult Sunday School class was frequently “standing room only.” He retired from Eckerd in 1977 but remained active in college affairs for another two decades.

His wife of 62 years, Dorothy, survives him along with three children; Jeanne Foster Kearley, Chula Vista, California; two sons, Dr. David E. Foster, Waukee, Iowa, and Gordon H. Foster, Crystal River, Florida; a sister, Barbara Prince, San Anselmo, California; six grandchildren and two great-grandchildren.