

Date of Birth

Mar 07, 1925



Date of Passing

Jan 21, 2014

WILLIAM SPACK

William (Bill) Spack, Jr., passed away from natural causes on July 21 at his home in Los Alamos. Bill was born on March 7, 1925, in Yonkers, N.Y., to William Spack, Sr. and Mary R. Spack. He graduated from Yonkers High School and from Syracuse University where he earned a Bachelor's degree in Electrical Engineering. He served in the Army Signal Corp and the Army Corp of Engineers. Bill was married for 52 years to Jane Russell of Pittsfield, Mass., who passed away in 2001. Bill was a member of the staff of the Los Alamos National Laboratory for 32 years. His career in Los Alamos involved the LANL's computers, their peripheral and ancillary equipment and the Integrated Computer Network which connected the major computers to each other and to small computers and terminals throughout the LANL. In 1955, he joined the LANL's group that was responsible for the success of MANIAC which was the first stored-program computer. (MANIAC's historic predecessor, ENIAC, at the University of Pennsylvania, lacked the internally-stored programs and so is more appropriately described as a calculator rather than a computer.) The MANIAC group, led by Nicholas Metropolis, had embarked on the design and fabrication of a more powerful successor research computer, MANIAC II. Bill designed all the control circuitry except for that within the machine's original electrostatic memory. Upon its completion, to keep pace

with the group's rapidly advancing research in computer languages and operating systems, MAINIC II itself evolved over time as new hardware technology gradually replaced the original. Bill was chief hardware engineer as the vacuum tube/electrostatic memory machine "morphed" into a solid-state/magnetic-core memory system with new peripheral equipment. His hardware design and hardware-group management responsibilities yielded to strategic planning for, and managing the acquisition of, additional computing resources for LANL. It was the beginning of the modern computer age. To Congress and many others, the cost of computers seemed excessive and to many others, LANL's appetite for new ones seemed insatiable. Indeed it was insatiable because there was virtually no limit to the amount of computing power that could be usefully applied by LANL in pursuit of the Federal government's programmatic goals. Bill devoted much effort to writing and to interacting with others at various administrative levels to explain and seek support for LANL's computer acquisition proposals, so trips to Washington, D.C. were frequent. In 1968, when the Computer Science and Services Division (C Division) was formed, Bill was appointed an Assistant Division Leader. His later positions included Associate, Alternate and Deputy Division Leader. When the Theoretical and Computational Physics Directorate (TCP Directorate) was established in 1986, Bill was appointed a Deputy Associate Director. At the time of Bill's retirement in late 1987, C Division reported that Bill had managed the acquisition of most of the equipment then in its central computing facility. This included the major computers, data storage systems and peripheral equipment of every type. At home Bill enjoyed music. His instrument, which he played with enthusiasm, was a replica of a 1920's era Wurlitzer theatre pipe organ. Bill and Jane especially liked Broadway musicals. From time to time, they drove to New York with advance tickets for the latest offerings and for a "legitimate" play or two in Manhattan. Their visits to the big city always included a side trip to a Vermont lake to visit relatives. They also enjoyed travel to far-off places and took some lengthy wide-ranging tours in addition to shorter visits, eventually encompassing every continent except Africa. More recently, accompanied by a niece, Bill toured China, the Galapagos Islands, Alaska and the Panama Canal. For sightseeing closer to home, Bill belonged to a hiking group that each week visited interesting places on and around the Pajarito Plateau. When the Aquatic center opened, it provided Bill with an all-season, all-weather venue for exercise by swimming. Bill was preceded in death by his wife Jane, his parents, his infant sister Anne, his younger brother Edward and his older sister Mary Hyra. Bill is survived by his sister in law, Barbara Tompkins Spack of Phoenix, Ariz.;

nephews: Edward G. Spack, Jr. of Sunnyvale, Calif., William L. Spack of Arlington, Va. and David B. Spack of Phoenix, Ariz.; and nieces: Evelyn Hyra of Tryon, N.D., Jacquelynn Hyra of Jamestown, N.D., and Jeanne Johnson of Fair Haven, N.J. A special thank you to Bill's devoted caregiver, Louise Montoya, and to Los Alamos Visiting Nurse Service, Inc. for their help and hospice care during Bill's last days. Out of respect for Bill's wishes, there will be no services. Donations to Los Alamos Visiting Nurse Service, Inc. in Bill and Jane's memory are welcome.

Memories of William



