

William M. Woodward

September 19, 1916 — April 22, 1983

Professor Woodward joined the Cornell faculty as an assistant professor of physics and nuclear studies in February 1948, having come from a similar position at Massachusetts Institute of Technology. He was promoted to associate professor in 1952 and to professor in 1960. He retired from the Faculty on June 30, 1982, and was then granted the status of professor emeritus.

Woodward was born in Hartford, Connecticut. He lived there until his family moved to New York City in 1930 and then to Toms River, New Jersey, in 1931, where he completed his high school education in 1934. He received his undergraduate education at MIT and at Columbia University, from which he graduated in 1938. He did his graduate work at Princeton University and was awarded the Ph.D. degree in 1941, having written a thesis on infrared spectroscopy.

In late 1941 Professor Woodward joined a project at Princeton to develop a method for separating the isotopes of uranium. When that project was completed in March 1943, he joined the Los Alamos Laboratory, where he studied the nuclear properties of the fissile materials that were used to create the atomic bomb.

Immediately after the bombing in Hiroshima and Nagasaki he became involved in the movement of scientists working towards the international control of atomic weapons. He contributed significantly to the effort in Washington to educate members of Congress about these problems and played an important role in the creation of the Federation of Atomic Scientists.

From the time of his arrival at Cornell until the mid-1960s, Woodward applied his considerable talent and understanding to teaching and research and to the affairs of the Department of Physics, the Laboratory of Nuclear Studies, and the University. He taught a wide variety of courses to undergraduates and graduate students. With his students and his colleagues he carried out a research program that was innovative and made important additions to our knowledge of the properties of the elementary particles. He conducted his research at the main facility of the laboratory, the electron synchrotron, and also devised a series of “table-top scale” experiments that were particularly suited to the involvement of students and enriched the program of the laboratory. Woodward served as chairman of the graduate admissions committee of the department and as field representative to the Graduate School. He was an undergraduate adviser and was the chairman of the graduate committees for about ten students.

In the mid-1960s Woodward suffered a series of serious physical ailments that necessarily curtailed his activities. Nonetheless, he continued to contribute to the work of the laboratory and the University under circumstances that would have hopelessly discouraged most people. When the Cornell 10 GeV synchrotron was built in 1965-67, he performed the primary survey for the half-mile magnet ring, a task that required pushing the classical methods of surveying to their limits of precision. He later transferred his intellectual interests to biology. In 1976 he felt that he could no longer carry out an effective program of teaching and research, and he was granted a medical disability leave.

Woodward was a member of the American Physical Society and of Sigma Xi. He was a Guggenheim fellow in 1955-56, when he spent the academic year at Stanford University.

Professor Woodward's research and teaching were noted for their originality and creativity. He was a devoted teacher who inspired his students to produce research of the highest quality. He was exceptionally kind, generous, and thoughtful to all with whom he associated. During his entire career he gave generously of his time and energy to foster a better public understanding of the impact of science on society. He was devoted to science as an intellectual pursuit and as a force for the betterment of life. We who were fortunate to have known and worked with him are grateful for his intellectual stimulation and for the pleasure we derived from his presence.

Kurt Gottfried, Peter C. Stein, John W. DeWire