

# Charles Francis Hockett

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Charles (“Chas”) Hockett came to Cornell in the fall of 1946 as a founding member of the Division of Modern Languages, a division of Cornell University which was established for the purpose of teaching the modern languages applying the principles of modern linguistics as understood at the time. Like all the founding members of the Division of Modern Languages, Professor Hockett had charge of a language program—his assignment was Chinese—and for 15 years, Chas ran the Chinese language program in addition to teaching courses in linguistics of all kinds. He was the soul of the linguistics program from his first years until his retirement in 1982, serving on the committee of almost all students enrolled in linguistics during his time, and serving as director of 25 Ph.D. dissertations. His enormous influence was by no means confined to linguistics at Cornell. From his days as a doctoral student to the end of his career, Professor Hockett was at the center of American linguistic thought, the author of seminal books and articles which shaped the American linguistic theory known as “structuralism”. In addition to his shorter articles, many of which were considered seminal to linguistic theory, his book, *Phonology* (1955), shaped phonological theory for a decade and remains important to this day. His introduction to linguistics from 1955, *A Course in Modern Linguistics*, is regarded as a model of clarity. It was a comprehensive introduction to the gamut of linguistic knowledge that had developed by that time and became the standard introductory text for nearly two decades. It continues to be widely studied to this day. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, new theories and approaches developed to rival “structuralism” in American linguistics, most notably those associated with the work of Noam Chomsky. Professor Hockett nonetheless continued to pursue the structuralist program and remained a productive thinker in linguistics to the end of his life.

Chas was born in Columbus, Ohio, where his father, Homer Carey Hockett, taught American history at Ohio State University. Chas entered Ohio State in 1932 at the age of 16, receiving his B.A. and M.A. degrees jointly in 1939. He continued at Yale University, where he studied with the two greatest American linguists of the 1930s, Leonard Bloomfield and Edward Sapir. He finished his Ph.D. degree in a record three years with a dissertation on the then moribund Potawatomi language spoken in Michigan, which became the inspiration for much of the theoretical advances in linguistics that Professor Hockett developed in the subsequent decade. He was widely regarded as Bloomfield’s successor and edited, reworked, and published as dictionaries, grammars, and texts Bloomfield’s voluminous data gathered over a period of more than ten years of work with the now dead Menomini language of Wisconsin. Chas was as much a follower of the anthropological linguist, Sapir, however, and was invited to become

a member of Cornell's Department of Anthropology in 1957. In 1973, he published an introductory anthropology text, *Man's Place in Nature*, which was well received and which he himself regarded as his best work.

As the foremost linguist of his generation and one of the great American linguists of all time, Chas was the recipient of numerous honors. He was named the Goldwin Smith Professor of Linguistics and Anthropology at Cornell, elected to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and the National Academy of Science, and served as President of the Linguistic Society of America.

Chas had a lively and successful intellectual life in linguistics and anthropology, but he was a man of many parts. He had a deep love for music and a keen ear, and he engaged in a lifelong practice of musical performance and composition. A talented wind instrumentalist, he and his wife, Shirley, were early members of the Ithaca Concert Band, which closed every concert with "Stars and Stripes Forever" featuring Chas on the piccolo. The music he composed ranged from the witty and light to serious and sophisticated, from short pieces written for family and friends and the ICB (some with lyrics he had written as well), to chamber works, to a serious full-length opera, *The Love of Doña Rosita*, based on a play by F. García Lorca, *Los Títeres de Cachiporra*, which received its premier performance by the Ithaca Opera at Ithaca College. Although his professional career was as a linguist, toward the end of his life Chas came to regard his musical compositions as his most lasting legacy.

Chas enjoyed a long and happy marriage to the former Shirley Orlinoff, a mathematician and author of a half-dozen textbooks (which, incidentally, were ALL typed by Chas), with whom he had four girls and one boy. Home life revolved around music. Everyone in the family played an instrument, and family life was enlivened by musical performances together, often of Chas' compositions. Two of his children became professional musicians; one received a Ph.D. degree in Classics and is now a professional writer and instructional designer; one is a book producer; and their son is a systems analyst. Music was Chas' contribution to the Ithaca community. Throughout the last decades of his life, Chas and his wife, Shirley, were unstinting in their financial support and indefatigable in the energy they devoted to bringing music to the Ithaca public. It is largely their leadership and hard work that established the Cayuga Chamber Orchestra, a musical institution which has enriched the musical life of the community far beyond the contributions of Ithaca College and Cornell University, and which after more than a quarter of a century, promises to endure.

*James Gair, Sally McConnell-Ginet, John Wolff*