

Memorial minute for Franklin Miller Jr.

A fabled Kenyon life came to a close yesterday with the peaceful passing of Franklin Miller Jr. in the company of his family at Autumn Health Care in Mount Vernon. The longtime Gambier resident had celebrated his 100th birthday on September 8 at a College party and concert at Rosse Hall.

His gentle soul served him well. The professor emeritus of physics arrived at Kenyon in 1948 and retired in 1981. Along the way Franklin embodied the definition of a Kenyon professor as a teacher, mentor, and scholar and, as well, as a community keystone.

William McCulloh, professor emeritus of classics and a fellow musician with Franklin in what became a decades-long, weekly tradition of string-quartet play in the Miller home, noted his old friend's "kindness and concern for others." McCulloh added, "The tallest tree in our landscape has fallen, but it fell gently in this beautiful autumn. His ceaselessly active mind will always be present to those who knew him." The community will greatly miss the man, President S. Georgia Nugent said. "With the passing of Franklin Miller, Kenyon has lost a legendary and inspirational figure. Franklin exemplified the intellectual life of boundless curiosity and lifelong learning."

He was prominent in the world of physics. "He was the backbone of the physics department," said Tom Greenslade, Jr., professor emeritus of physics. "He was able to do both experimental work and theoretical work. It's hard to overstate the fact that he was very well-known in the physics teaching community. His book (College Physics) sold the better part of a million copies."

Reminders will endure on the campus. The Franklin Miller Observatory, originally constructed in 1993, and the Franklin Miller Lecture Hall (Room 101, Hayes Hall) were named in his honor. The Franklin Miller Award, established by Edward T. "Chip" Ordman '64, is given to students who make unusual or significant contributions to the academic environment of the College. The Franklin Miller Jr. Endowed Scholarship in Physics was recently established by John A. Woollam '61 H'08.

Franklin was born in St. Louis, Missouri, the son of Franklin Miller, a lawyer and judge, and Maude Barnes, a writer. Among his early memories were street celebrations marking the end of World War I in 1918.

He graduated from Swarthmore College in 1933 and received a doctorate in physics from the University of Chicago in 1939. He taught physics and astronomy at Rutgers University from 1937 to 1948 and at Kenyon from 1948 until his retirement in 1981. He returned to the classroom during the 1985-86 academic year. In 1959 he published the textbook *College Physics*, widely used in six editions, and was senior co-author of *Concepts in Physics*, which was used in high schools around the country, including Mount Vernon High School. With a grant from the National Science Foundation in 1963, he produced a series of short, single- concept physics demonstration films, including his preservation of a famous film clip of the gallop and collapse of the Tacoma (Washington) Narrows Bridge. In 1993 the film series was transcribed to videotape format, and in 2001 the series was transcribed to videodisc format. He received the 1970 Millikan Award of the American Association of Physics Teachers for "creative teaching of physics."

Franklin had many interests outside his professional work. As an amateur musician, he played viola in the early years of the Knox County Symphony, and, since 1939, he regularly played string quartets with friends in his home. He was coach of the Lords soccer team for four seasons in the early 1950s.

As a result of following his genealogy hobby for 77 years, Franklin published three books listing data for some 21,000 relatives, most of them of degree fourth cousin and closer. He helped prepare several volumes of records published by the Knox County Genealogical Society, of which he was a founding member. He served as president of a number of civic organizations, including the Knox County Mental Health Association, United Way of Knox County, and Kenyon Festival Theater. He helped found the Knox County Chapter of the NAACP. Franklin received the Mount Vernon Jaycees Outstanding Citizen Award in 1976.

He was an engineer and announcer in the early days of radio station WMVO. He enjoyed several personas on the air. As a disc jockey on a classical music show called "Music of the Masters" he was Franklin Miller. He became Dr. Franklin Miller on a program called "This Week in Science." As Professor Franklin Miller, he hosted "Kenyon College on the Air." He delivered sports news as Frank Miller. And as "Old Doc," he spun records on a bluegrass music show. Franklin also helped install and orient many early television antennas in Gambier. He was a member of the Granville Monthly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers). Because of his beliefs he declined an invitation to work on the atomic bomb Manhattan Project during World War II, taking the position that scientists and engineers have personal responsibility for the foreseeable results of their technical work and should use their training for the good of humanity rather than its destruction. After the war he was a co-founder of the International Society for Social Responsibility in Science. As president of that group, he met with fellow-member Albert Einstein, just a few weeks before Einstein's death in 1955. He counted several other Nobel Prize winners as friends and colleagues.

President Nugent noted Franklin's refusal to work on the Manhattan Project, calling him "a towering moral exemplar."

She also recalled his role as a ubiquitous presence at College events, right up until his 100th year. "Convocation, Honors Day, Commencement - Franklin was there. Special events honoring students, faculty, or staff - Franklin was there. Concerts, lectures, special events - Franklin was there," she said. "One of my fondest memories of him was a few years ago when Howard and Judy Sacks were playing bluegrass music at the Village Inn. My recollection is that the program began at 1 0:00 p.m. And there, at a front-row table, was the nonagenarian Franklin, enjoying a beer and excited to hear the music."

Franklin's role in the community stands out for Lisa D. Schott '80, managing director of the Philander Chase Corporation and the former director of the Office of Alumni and Parent Programs. "To me, he was the role model for how to live in this community," she said. "He was true community. He was passionate. He was, until the end, very curious. He was very caring and unfailingly kind. I can't imagine we won't see him again."

Liz Keeney, member of the Board of Campus Ministries, was greeted with enthusiasm by Franklin

when she joined the campus Quaker worship group in 1991. "Franklin has been a source of wisdom, an inspiration, and a friend," she said. "The Gambier Friends Gathering has grown into a vibrant group. Franklin has been the glue as we have grown. It won't be the same."