

In Memoriam

Irving Wentworth Wood, known as “Irv” to his colleagues and “Woody” to his friends and family, died at his home in Northport, Long Island, on February 2, 2002, at the age of 75. In addition to his professional renown as a meticulous audio engineer, he was an avid sailor, amateur radio operator (K2IRZ), hiker, camper, music lover, archeologist, and longtime AES member.

Irv had many “firsts” and innovations, including the original integrated boardroom table sound system to use “mix minus” circuitry. Designed for Continental Oil’s large, round board table and similarly round boardroom, this engineering masterpiece became the precursor of some twenty more “Fortune 50” boardroom designs, and was the predecessor of today’s commercial automatic mixers. Each of these boardroom systems was individually engineered and “tuned” by Irv for its environment.

The installations performed so flawlessly that, in demonstrations, people initially credited exceptional room acoustics with their ability to hear so perfectly, and could not understand why a sound system was even necessary until it was turned off and intelligibility suddenly disappeared.

Irv also brought audio and radio together in the creation of an early wireless microphone for the chairman of AT&T. The design used a small electret capsule connected to a belt-clip transmitter with the microphone cable cut to simultaneously serve as the transmitting antenna—a technique unheard of at the time. AT&T insisted on the best possible sound for its shareholders’ meetings and, for



Irving W. Wood
1926–2002

twelve years, relied on Irv’s expertise to achieve that goal. Success required starting a year ahead of time to re-engineer the audio installations for each hall around the country in which the meeting was to be held.

Born in San Francisco, California, Irv was home-schooled in his early years by a progressive, innovative and altruistic mother, who moved the family across the country in a 1933 Pierce Arrow Touring Car, which she inventively had modified into something of an early SUV, complete with original house trailer.

Irv’s great fascination with all things historical, mechanical and electrical emerged on this trip as the family visited myriad famous and obscure locations, with Irv picking up and repairing cast-off items found along the way. His propensity for collecting, analyzing, restoring, learning, and improving never ended.

After graduating from high school in Rye, New York, he served in the

Navy during World War II. He then attended Antioch College in Ohio where he married Ruth Semans Wood, who died two years ago. They were married for 50 years. A largely self-taught audio engineer, Irv’s never-ending pursuit of excellence made both him and his designs widely known and respected during his career, which included 17 years with Sound Systems, Inc. of Long Island and another 17 years as senior vice president with the consulting firm of Hubert Wilke, Inc. of New York, from which he retired in 1994.

Irv was joint author of two *JAES* publications: “Sound System Design for the New York State Theater” (*JAES*, Vol. 13, No. 2, April 1965) and “A Completely Automated Multichannel Sound System” for the Dupont Theater (Preprint 362, October 1964). He also authored “Guidelines For Good Sound” published in *Architectural Record* (June 1971 – Special Report No. 14, Part 2).

He is survived by his sister, Judith Wood Spock, brother-in-law, sister-in-law, three nephews, four nieces and fourteen grandnieces and nephews. A memorial gathering was held on April 6 at the Smithtown Landing Country Club where friends, family, neighbors and past associates exchanged some of the countless stories about Woody, his innovations and his exploits.

Irv will be sorely missed by the many friends he made in audio, over the airwaves, and on the sea, all of whom learned so much from this kind and gentle giant of creativity, who was always willing to mentor any who were interested in learning.

Robert E. McFarlane
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