

In Memoriam

Rex Isom, AES honorary member, died 11 January 2003, at the age of 92. He was born in Mitchell, IN, and earned a bachelor's degree from Butler University. Later studies at both George Washington University and Harvard led to master's degrees. He was pursuing a doctorate when World War II interrupted his schooling. After military service he joined RCA and was engaged in the development of recording systems for film and video as well as telecine products, primarily in the New Jersey facility. The method of film pull-down for adapting 24-frame/second film to the 30 frame/second video rate is something that we have all seen — just about every day of our lives — since the 1950s.

When H. E. Roys retired from RCA Records, Rex was chosen as the new director of RCA's Record Engineering group in Indianapolis, a position he held from 1966 to his retirement in 1976. Rex held 21 patents and was active in international standardization work. He was a member of Phi Kappa Phi and a fellow of the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers, Society of Motion Picture and Television Engineers, and the Audio Engineering Society. He was president of the AES in 1976-77.

It is easy to overlook the era in which Rex made his mark in recording technology. During the quarter century after the war, the major record companies worldwide were vertically integrated, complete with their own development engineering groups. Along with such men as William Bachman of Columbia Records and Ed Uecke of Capitol Records in the U. S., Rex was responsible at RCA Records for developmental and experimental work in everything from plant process control to studio electronics and console componentry.

One of Rex's projects was the bold move at RCA Victor to replace the traditional 135-gram LP with one



Warren Rex Isom
1910-2003

weighing only 80 grams. The notion was laughed at by many traditionalists — until Rex demonstrated that the smaller profile cross-section actually improved the molding properties of vinyl by increasing the particle rate of compound flow during the pressing cycle. The 30% savings in material meant that the plants could use premium material for all processing, further improving the finished LP product, both standard and CD-4 Quadraphonic. The major problem was an initial increase in disc warpage, which was solved through new handling processes on the press floor.

Another thorny problem tackled by Rex was replacing the venerable RCA "tape tree," which had been used for all high-speed duplicating activities since the introduction of prerecorded tape in the mid-1950s. That system had imposed considerable air drag on the duplicating master tape and could not operate reliably at high speeds. The high duplicating speed ratios, which had been made possible by electronic and magnetic head improvements, prompted RCA and

others to move to random tape bins for buffering the master tapes. Rex and others at the Indianapolis plant came up with their own high performance version.

Many AES members will remember the monumental 300-page *Centennial Issue* of the *AES Journal...The Phonograph and Sound Recording After 100 Years* (1977 October/November). Rex was the guest editor. He said that it occupied him for the entire year that he retired from RCA Victor. One could always expect of Rex anything from a whimsical *bon mot* to a sage observation. One day at lunch during an AES Convention in Paris, he said it would be a shame to have come this far and not see the most glorious stained glass in the world. One hour later, three of us were in a car on our way to Chartres Cathedral — returning that evening in time for the AES Banquet.

Rex is survived by two sons and three grandchildren. His wife Ruth died a year ago.

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