

Obituaries

Norman Pickering 1916–2015



Norman Charles Pickering died peacefully at his East Hampton, NY, home on Wednesday, November 18, at age 99.

Born in Brooklyn on July 9, 1916, he had a long, multi-faceted career as an inventor, musician, acoustical researcher, and musical instrument maker. A pioneer of high fidelity audio, he invented the Pickering phonograph cartridge. He was one of the founders of the Audio Engineering Society and its first secretary.

He was awarded an AES Fellowship in 1952 for his contributions to the field of audio engineering and an AES Award in 1955 in acknowledgment of his role in the formation and advancement of AES.

He was educated at Newark College of Engineering and the Juilliard Gradu-

ate School, becoming both a professional engineer and professional musician. He joined the newly formed Indianapolis Symphony in 1937 where he played for three seasons, teaching at the National Music Camp in Interlochen, Michigan, during the summers. In early 1940 he was asked to join the research group at C.G. Conn in Elkhart, Indiana, where development of wind instruments involved sound recording of the highest quality possible at the time. This work was interrupted on when World War II started, and the instrument-making plant was converted to making gyroscopic aircraft instruments for Sperry Gyroscope Company. Pickering was invited to join the Sperry Research Laboratory in Garden City and he spent the war years there.

In November 1945 he founded Pickering and Company to produce phonograph pickups and associated equipment. The company was an immediate success. His work in recording led to association with George Szell and the Cleveland Orchestra, Les Paul, Capitol Records, and many musical artists. He continued to play professionally as a New York free-lancer. It was in 1948 that he joined C. J. LeBel and other audio engineers to form the Audio Engineering Society.

As his company became too large for him to manage alone, he hired Walter Stanton as sales manager. It was not long before Stanton organized a hostile takeover of the company, forcing Pickering out of his company and out of the audio field. Making use of the wartime experience, he returned to aviation, becoming

vice president and technical director of Avien, Inc. and later of Robintech, Inc. In 1970 he became technical director of a laboratory in Southampton Hospital for development of high-resolution ultrasonic imaging.

Since 1980 he devoted himself to study of the acoustics of violins and their bows and was a long-time consultant to D'Addario and Co., Inc., manufacturer of strings for musical instruments. He was a past president of the Violin Society of America. He received awards for his work and an Honorary Doctorate from his alma mater, which is now New Jersey Institute of Technology.

In 1989 he helped found Pianofest in the Hamptons and continued as a board member, creative consultant, and practical advisor until his death.

He is survived by his wife of 36 years, who uses the professional name Barbara Goldowsky; four children by two previous marriages; the sons of Barbara Goldowsky; four nieces; numerous grandchildren and great-grandchildren. The survivors are: Judith Crow of Winston-Salem, NC; David Pickering of Queen Creek, AZ; Frederick Pickering of Sag Harbor, NY; Rolf Pickering of Evergreen, CO; Alexander Goldowsky and Boris Goldowsky, both of Boston, MA, and their families.

Cremation was private. The family is planning a memorial service, date to be announced. Friends wishing to make memorial gifts may donate to East End Hospice or the East Hampton Free Library.

Barbara Goldowsky Pickering