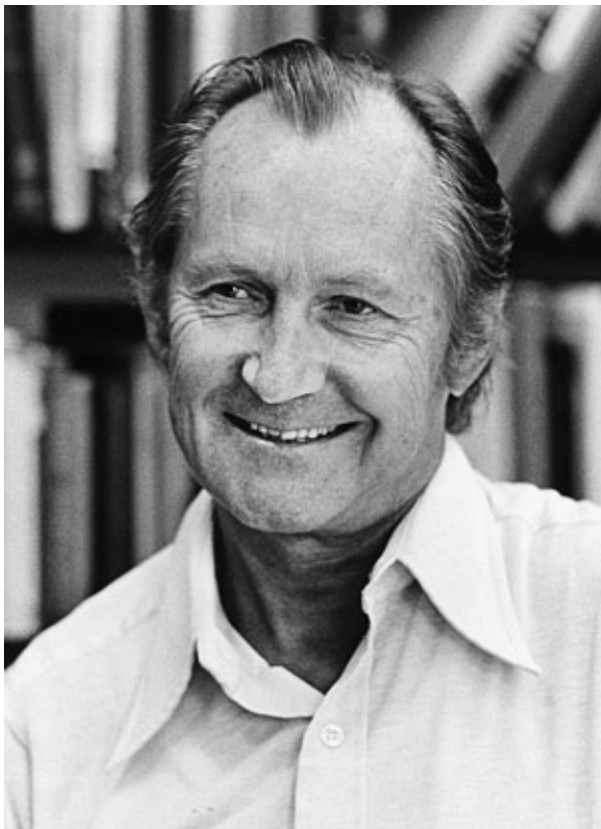




Obituary

GEORGE HERRMANN (19th April 1921 – 7th January 2007)



George Herrmann, professor emeritus of mechanical engineering at Stanford University, died suddenly upon collapsing in a Zurich train station on 7th January 2007. He was 85.

Herrmann was chairman of the Applied Mechanics Department from 1970 to 1975. After Applied Mechanics became a division of the Mechanical Engineering Department, he continued to chair the division until his retirement in 1984.

His academic work focused on elasticity theory and continuum mechanics, which deal with forces acting on physical structures such as long tubes. He also was a consultant for a variety of corporations and government organizations, including the U.S. Army, Air Force and Navy.

“He was interested in some key problems in understanding the engineering and physics of material behavior,” said Charles Steele, professor emeritus of mechanical engineering. “He was capable of getting some really simple results for what appeared to be complex problems.” These include situations such as the bending of a steel beam or the appearance of cracks in a solid surface.

Herrmann was born in Moscow on April 19, 1921, and moved to Switzerland at the age of 12. He attended the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology, where he received a bachelor’s degree in 1945 and a doctorate in 1949, both in civil engineering. After a year as a postdoctoral fellow at École Polytechnique in Canada, he became an associate professor of civil engineering at Columbia University in 1951 and then a professor at Northwestern University in 1962 before coming to Stanford in 1970.

At the time of his death, Herrmann was living in Zurich, Switzerland, though he visited Stanford several times each year. Although retired from his professorship, he maintained much the same life that he had for years. He continued to publish papers, give talks, attend and organize conferences and collaborate on books.

“He knew how to live,” said Thomas Kane, professor emeritus of mechanical engineering. “Art, science, music—with anything he was interested in, he didn’t waste time on anything less than the best. I think this was someone who, first and foremost, knew how to get the best out of life.”

Colleagues described Herrmann as an extraordinary individual who was still trying to learn Spanish toward the end of his life even though he was fluent in English, German, French, Russian, Italian and Portuguese. He maintained a strong interest in the arts and humanities, and had the ability to converse about diverse topics.

“I used to tell him that we could probably parachute him nude and penniless into a small Albanian village, and that by the next morning he would be having breakfast and drinks with the villagers, wearing one of their suits and having half the wealth of the area,” wrote mechanical engineering Professor David Barnett in a biography for Herrmann’s 70th birthday. “Lest this sound preposterous, I really believe such an experiment would have had that result. George either knew everyone worth knowing, or would end up making their acquaintance.”

Said mechanical engineering Professor Peter Pinsky: “George might in some ways represent the passing of an era. He is one of the last individuals of his generation, who represent this ideal of being a generalist. The young people nowadays are so focused, so driven, that we lose that.”

Herrmann is survived by his daughter, Anne Herrmann of Dexter, Mich.; his son, Peter Herrmann of Küsnacht, Switzerland; and two grandchildren, Celine and Henrik.

Publisher's Note

The publication of this obituary coincides with the fiftieth anniversary of the publication of the *Journal of Applied Mathematics and Mechanics*, the English language translation of the Russian journal *Prikladnaya Matematika i Mekhanika*. George Herrmann was

instrumental in bringing this vision to reality, and he remained actively associated with the journal until the time of his death. It is a testament to his contribution to mechanical engineering that the journal continues to thrive today.

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