

Frederic L. Holmes (1932–2003)



Frederic Lawrence Holmes was born in Cincinnati, Ohio in 1932. He received his B.S. degree in quantitative biology from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1954 and took special satisfaction from rowing for MIT at the Henley Regatta. He then began graduate work in the Department of History at Harvard, but his study was interrupted by two years in the U. S. Air Force. He received his M.A. degree in history in 1958, but on returning to Harvard he transferred to the Department of the History of Science, where he received the Ph.D. degree in 1962 with a dissertation on "Claude Bernard and the Concept of the Internal Environment."

After two years at MIT he left to become an assistant professor in Yale's Department of the History of Science and Medicine, and was promoted to associate professor in 1968. In 1972 he went to the University of Western Ontario where he was professor and department chair. He remained there until 1979, returning to Yale as a full professor and chair (1979–2002) of the Section of the History of Medicine in the School of Medicine. He became Avalon Professor in 1985, and from 1982 to 1987 was

Master of Jonathan Edwards College. He became a leading force in building the history of science and medicine at Yale. He initiated an undergraduate major in the history of science/history of medicine and in 1986 a graduate program in the history of medicine and the life sciences. In 2002 he helped establish a new Program in the History of Medicine and Science.

Holmes was the author of more than sixty papers on the history of life sciences and his books include: *Claude Bernard and Animal Chemistry* (1974); *Lavoisier and the Chemistry of Life* (1985); *Hans Krebs: The Formation of a Scientific Life, 1900–1933* (1991); *Hans Krebs: Architect of Intermediary Metabolism, 1933–1937* (1993); *Antoine Lavoisier; The Next Crucial Year: Or, The Sources of His Quantitative Method in Chemistry* (1997); *Meselson, Stahl, and the Replication of DNA: A History of "The Most Beautiful Experiment in Biology"* (2001); and *Investigative Pathways: Patterns and Stages in the Careers of Experimental Scientists* (2004). Before his death, Holmes completed the manuscript of *Between Molecular Biology and the Classical Gene: The Pathway of Seymour Benzer into the rII Region* (with William C. Summers, 2006). His historical studies have helped define the field of the history of science and medicine, which he has led both by his published contributions, scholarly example and mentorship of graduate students and junior colleagues.

Holmes was awarded the History of Science Society's Schumann Prize (1962), Pfizer Prize (1975), and Sarton Medal (2000); the American Association for the History of Medicine's William H. Welch Medal (1978); and the Dexter Award (1994). He was president of the History of Science Society in 1981–1983, became a fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in 1994 and a Member of the American Philosophical Society in 2000.

When he was inducted as a member of the American Philosophical Society, Holmes "characterized much of his work as an attempt to answer fundamental questions explaining how major discoveries are made. Knowledge is cumulative, indicating that every groundbreaking discovery is determined to a large extent by the discoveries that came before it." Holmes died at age 71 on March 27, 2003. Alan Rocke and John Warner have described him as "a gentle and generous teacher and colleague, and a formidable historian whose publications in the history of the life sciences and chemistry made him one of the world's leading historians of science."

Sources

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Biographical information provided by Susan Holmes.

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