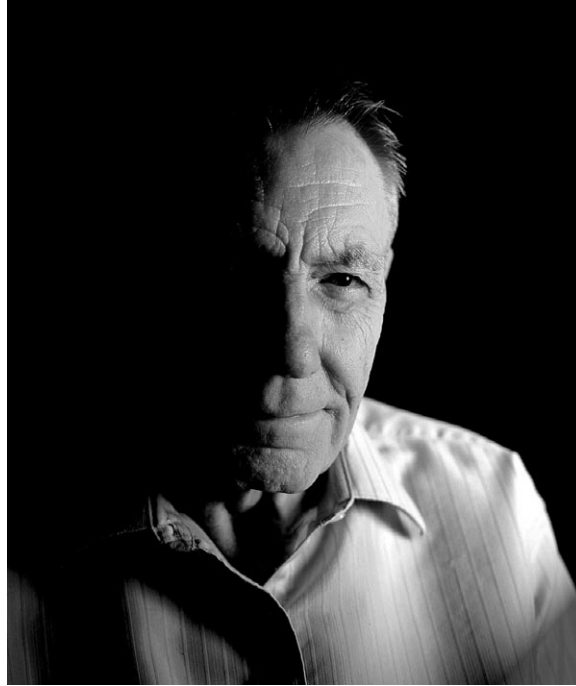


J. Richard Steffy, 1924–2007

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In one of the many heartfelt eulogies of J. Richard Steffy, he was described as a quiet genius. I understand how his modesty and kindness may have inspired this expression, but that is not the Dick Steffy I knew. I came to College Station, Texas, in 1998, long after he retired, and when I think of the feelings he inspired in all of us—students and faculty—when he came to the Nautical Archaeology Program building, quiet is not the first word that comes to mind. There was a real excitement when he entered our labs with his jokes and news. And there was always news. Although



Dick had retired almost a decade before I was admitted to the program, he worked all day every day doing something he loved and did very well: reconstructing ships' hulls.

J. Richard Steffy's career as a professional scientist is well known. He started working on the reconstruction of the seventh-century ship excavated by George Bass and Frederick van Doorninck at Yassiada, Turkey, in the early 1960s. A few years later, he moved to Cyprus with his family, where he reconstructed a small late fourth-century B.C.E. Greek cargo vessel, excavated by Michael and Susan Katzev off the northern coast of Kyrenia. In 1974, Dick Steffy joined the newly formed Institute of Nautical Archaeology and moved with it in 1976 to Texas A&M University, where, as a professor, he established himself as a leader in the field, producing at least one seminal article per year and gaining the admiration, respect, and friendship of everyone he met through his knowledge, integrity, and respect for his colleagues' ideas. In 1985, he was awarded a MacArthur fellowship, sometimes known as "the genius fellowship," for his achievements in the development of nautical archaeology. In 1990, he retired but stayed

in College Station. He told me many times that he could have retired anywhere in the world but had chosen College Station because it was close to his grandchildren—who he adored and who were always the first subject of our talks—and to the university library. Until the last weeks of his life, he worked, traveled, and published as diligently as ever, with always the same enthusiasm and the same gentle determination.

Dick said that ships carried people, cargoes, and ideas, and no one else managed to get deeper into the minds of the shipwrights who built, fixed, and modified ships through the ages than he did. From the 1960s until 2007, he

worked on more than 20 ships and boats, ranging from one of the 12th-Dynasty Egyptian boats from Dashur to the schooner *Thomas Skofield* from the early 1900s that had been lost on the shores of New Jersey. His contribution to the field is enormous: the methodology he developed to reconstruct a ship's hull from its scattered fragmentary remains and the sophistication and range of the factors he considered. Dick taught his students to look carefully at ships' timbers and try to understand the thought processes of the shipwrights and how they devised solutions using the technologies, materials, and tools available to them. This is easier said than done. And that is where his genius comes in. As a shipbuilding material, timber held no mysteries for him. His reconstructions and explanations were always logical, plausible, and practical, almost as if he had known the shipwright who built a particular vessel and understood his difficulties and ingenuity. With Dick around, it seemed easy.

His more than 50 published titles span five millennia of shipbuilding and have been collected and read by students and scholars around the world. For almost two decades, his book *Wooden Ship Building and the Interpre-*

tation of Shipwrecks has been the textbook for nautical archaeology around the world.¹

In 2001, I accepted a teaching position at Texas A&M University and assumed the direction of the J. Richard Steffy Ship Reconstruction Laboratory. I learned only last year that he had a definite role in my hiring. Although we both knew perfectly well that my feet would never fill his shoes, Dick Steffy insisted on treating me as an equal. He endorsed my first book, and he gave me candid advice whenever I came to him with a problem.

I dare say that to many of us, more than the genius, the scientist, and the leader, J. Richard Steffy will remain above all an unparalleled example of “gentlemanship” and integrity. In our times, money seems to be the only measure of happiness, achievement, and respectability. Ambition and greed are often treated as social virtues, and competition justifies the most ig-

noble behaviors among our own peers and students. J. Richard Steffy managed his career, his problems, and his conflicts with elegant determination and impeccable integrity, and that is perhaps his best legacy.

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¹ Steffy 1994.