

Gerald F. Watson II

22 May 1937- 28 January 2016



Born and raised in Erie, Pennsylvania, Jerry obtained his Bachelor of Science in meteorology at Pennsylvania State University in 1959 and continued his meteorological studies earning a Master of Science degree from The University of Chicago in 1962 and a Ph. D. from Florida State University in 1971. He joined the faculty at North Carolina State University in 1972 where he worked until well after his retirement in 1999. Service and collegiality marked Jerry's career as a scientist and educator.

With an outgoing and generous nature, Jerry helped build the atmospheric sciences program at NCSU. When he joined the university in what was then the Geosciences Department, the program was in its infancy. There were perhaps a dozen students majoring in meteorology – a small program enrolling mostly Air Force students, encompassing a two-year curriculum, and offering an undergraduate degree. The meteorology courses were taught by only two or three other faculty members.

From this early start, Jerry Watson laid the foundation for a major part of today's Department of Marine, Earth and Atmospheric Sciences where in that atmospheric branch alone there are fourteen faculty, over one hundred undergraduate majors, and forty graduate students. To build toward this success, Jerry spent most of his career as instructor and administrator of both the graduate and undergraduate curricula. He developed and taught courses ranging across a wide spectrum from Introductory Meteorology for freshmen to Numerical Weather Prediction for graduate students. His teaching style was organized, thorough, and meticulous. He loved to teach.

But Jerry's most outstanding contribution was his leadership and the team spirit he inspired. In that spirit he often assumed the challenging responsibility of coordinating faculty. People often liken this endeavor to herding cats, but Jerry did it well. He was the one who gathered his colleagues each semester to determine course offerings, class scheduling, teaching assignments, and graduate assistantships. Jerry did not claim ownership of the courses he developed, but encouraged rotating assignments among colleagues and supported them by sharing his materials. He organized at least two major curriculum revisions during his tenure.

In the publish-or-perish climate that developed as NCSU advanced, Jerry was not afraid to attend to details that ensured the highest quality to student education. Because it would be an excellent educational opportunity and better serve the university's physical needs, he designed and maintained a suite of rooftop instruments that continuously measured and recorded the weather elements on campus for over thirty years. The resulting data originally aided in planning the campus heating and cooling needs. Today they continue to enrich many courses.

Jerry served as academic advisor and mentor to undergraduate and graduate students and to the student chapter of the American Meteorological Society. He was the one who always brought the food to the picnic. He was an active and enthusiastic member of the Central North Carolina Chapter of the AMS and served in many official capacities for that group from president to coffee brewer. In forty-four years, he may have missed three or four monthly meetings. While hospitalized in Erie, Pennsylvania a week before he died, he asked if someone could unlock the meeting room and make the coffee.

Although Jerry's initial research at NCSU was in air quality, his main study areas mirrored his course offerings. They included the synoptic and mesoscale structure of mid-latitude weather systems, numerical methods, dynamics, and modeling. As in his teaching, his research was carefully planned and executed.

Jerry was gregarious, a consummate guest at any gathering, and a builder of relationships both at leisure and on the job. He continued the early leadership of Walter Saucier to promote collaboration between the university and the National Weather Service. He coordinated the NWS participation in a large multi-agency international field project – the Genesis of Atlantic Lows Experiment (GALE) in 1986 for which he planned the network of fifty mesoscale observing sites across the Carolinas and led daily forecast briefings during the two-month field program.

In his spare time Jerry was an avid amateur astronomer. He was an enthusiastic participant and co-founder of the Raleigh Astronomy Club. He ground mirrors, owned and built telescopes, helped design the club's observatory, led public sky viewing sessions, and gave talks to groups of all ages. In the later years of his career and during his retirement, he taught courses about telescopes, back-yard astronomy, and the composition and circulation of planetary atmospheres.

Jerry remained single throughout his life. Although his friends and colleagues served as his local family, he is survived by cousins, many nieces, nephews, great nieces, and great nephews scattered across the United States. He was "Uncle Jerry" to them and will be missed by everyone who knew him.