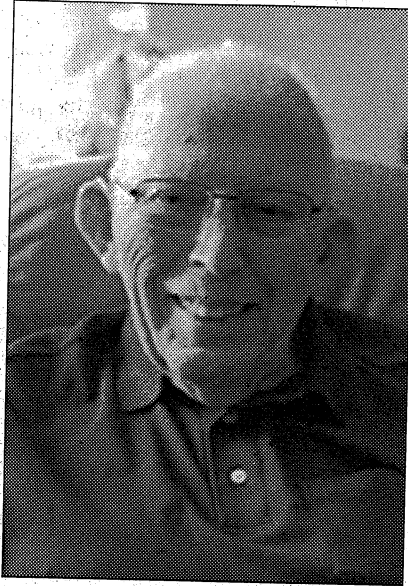


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## Beryl Clotfelter



Beryl Clotfelter, 97, of Grinnell, died at his residence in Beebe Hall of the Mayflower Community on Sunday, February 11, 2024.

A funeral service will be held at 10:00 a.m. on Saturday, February 17, 2024, at the Smith Funeral Home in Grinnell. Interment will be in Hazelwood Cemetery in Grinnell. A luncheon will follow in the Buckley Dining Hall of the Mayflower Community.

Memorials may be designated to benefit the Mayflower Community Human Needs Fund and mailed in care of the Smith Funeral Home and Crematory, PO Box 368, Grinnell, IA 50112. Memories

and condolences may be shared with Beryl's family online at [www.smithfh.com](http://www.smithfh.com).

Beryl Clotfelter, the son of Cecil and Velma, was born in Prague, Oklahoma. When he was two years old, the family moved to Kansas. Beryl graduated from high school in Gypsum, Kansas, in 1944. As an undergraduate at Oklahoma Baptist University, he met his future wife, Mary Lou. They were married in 1951.

Beryl earned M.S. and Ph.D. degrees in physics from the University of Oklahoma, with additional graduate study at The Ohio State University. After two years as a research physicist with a large company, he left industrial work for academia. He taught at the University of Idaho, Oklahoma Baptist University and from 1963 until his retirement in 1990, at Grinnell College in Grinnell, Iowa. During his Grinnell years, he did further study at Princeton University, Cambridge University, and the University of Edinburgh. He published two books and several papers.

For many years he was active in the Grinnell United Church of Christ, and more recently has been a member of Grinnell United Methodist Church. After retirement, Beryl did volunteer work, most notably with the Senior Health Insurance Information Program of the State of Iowa where he served as a volunteer counselor for 20 years. He also was Curator of the Physics Historical Museum at Grinnell College for several years. Until health problems forced a stop, he and Mary Lou traveled extensively. In 2012, Beryl and Mary Lou shared the Spirit of Giving, an award given by the Greater Poweshiek Community Foundation.

He was preceded in death by his parents, a sister, a brother and his wife Mary Lou. He is survived by his children: Anne (John), David (Lisa) and Susan (Rudy); five grandchildren: Elizabeth (Neil), David (Maggie), Katharine (Wyatt), Daniel (Tracey) and Sarah (Oby); and three great-grandchildren: Abby, Peter and Evelyn.

**From:** Grinnell College Office of the Dean <dean@grinnell.edu>  
**Sent:** Thursday, February 15, 2024 2:04 PM  
**To:** Grinnell College Faculty <faculty@lyris.grinnell.edu>  
**Subject:** Sad News — Professor Emeritus Beryl Clotfelter

Dear Colleagues,

It is with great sadness that I share news of the death of Professor Emeritus of Physics Beryl Clotfelter on Sunday, Feb. 11, in Grinnell. Beryl joined the faculty in 1963 and was named the "Williston Professor of Physics" in 1968. He retired in 1990. Beryl is remembered by his students, friends, and colleagues for his love of teaching, his wide-ranging interests, and his enthusiasm for tackling new materials.

Beryl earned his Ph.D. in physics from the University of Oklahoma in 1953. After three years at Phillips Petroleum Company, he taught at the University of Idaho and Oklahoma Baptist University before coming to Grinnell. During his Grinnell years, he had sabbatical leaves at Princeton University, Cambridge University, and the University of Edinburgh. He published several papers and two books: *Reference Systems and Inertia* (1970), and *The Universe and Its Structure* (1976).

Beryl's career highlights at Grinnell include his role when, as Chair of the Faculty in the early 1970s, he and Professor Alan Jones drafted a proposal for a no general-education requirements curriculum featuring a first-year student tutorial provision that still informs the College's distinctive academic experience.

Beryl had a wide-ranging intellect. For example, his courses during his Grinnell career included "History of Science (1543-1900)" and "History of Technology." He team-taught an eight-credit humanities course, "The Enlightenment: 1680-1800," that used only primary sources, including a section from Newton's *Principia*. He also enjoyed teaching classes for non-science majors, including a class popularly known as "Rocks and Stars."

Beryl also taught multiple times in the Grinnell-in-London program. During one such term, he team-taught a course on the industrial revolution with George Drake. Another course involved taking students to visit and study stone circles.

Beryl's signature course was "The Universe and its Structure." The textbook he wrote came directly from this course; both emphasized the importance of understanding our universe and its history through objects such as black holes and neutron stars as well as the cosmic microwave background. He introduced students to these topics well before they were part of the standard physics or astronomy curriculum and before cosmology became an astrophysics subdiscipline.

Courses such as these continue to this day and are part of Beryl's legacy to the College. Most importantly, Beryl was a beloved mentor to countless students and faculty colleagues over his 27-year career with the College.

Beryl and his late wife, Mary Lou Clotfelter, who passed away in October 2017, were well known and active on campus and in the community during his teaching career and following retirement. In 2012, Beryl and Mary Lou shared the Spirit of Giving award presented by the Greater Poweshiek Community Foundation.

A funeral service for Beryl will be held at 10 a.m. on Saturday, Feb. 17, at the Smith Funeral Home in Grinnell. Interment will be in Hazelwood Cemetery in Grinnell. A luncheon will follow at the Mayflower Community, where Beryl was a resident. An online obituary and tribute wall for Beryl are available on the Smith Funeral Home website.

Grinnell College was greatly enriched by Beryl's many years of devoted service, and he will be missed. Through our memories he will remain a cherished member of our community. I ask that you keep Beryl and his family and friends in your thoughts.

Sincerely,  
Beronda

**Beronda Montgomery**  
Vice President of Academic Affairs and Dean of the College