

Memorial: Thomas A. Hern
1941-2019

Thomas Albert Hern was born December 23, 1941 in Cincinnati, the oldest son of Harry Thomas and Jane Louise (Bader) Hern. Steven Charles Hern, his younger brother was born three years later. It was a historical time in the early forties, when their father had been drafted for WWII, but his health had not permitted him to join in the battles overseas. Instead his father worked at Wright Aeronautical plant in Evanston, where he and others assembled superchargers for large “Cyclone” aircraft engines that supported the war effort. Part of his early life was spent on a farm that his father and Uncle Charles Hern enjoyed in Loveland where they raised pigs and turkeys. After his uncle died in 1948, his father sold his portion of the family farm and moved back to the city to begin an independent homebuilding business. City life afforded Tom time to join the Boy Scouts. He became an active Scout, eventually rising to Junior Scoutmaster. During his scout career he enjoyed attending the National Jamboree and Philmont Scout Ranch in New Mexico.

His early educational years were spent at Madisonville School and Withrow High School. One thing that he remarked on in later years is that he received a good grounding in printing and bookbinding, for the Madisonville students printed and bound their own eighth grade yearbook. Tom continued to learn fundamentals of printing and bookbinding at Withrow High School. He found these skills useful with the software used today.

In his second year at Withrow Tom entered the Advance Placement sequence in mathematics. It was early in the national AP program. He did three years of high school mathematics in two years, and then calculus his senior year with teacher Martha Graham. It was her teaching style that Tom adopted into his own educational career.

The Withrow Minstrels variety show was Tom’s sole extracurricular activity in high school where he participated on the stage crew, building sets and running the lights.

In 1960 he graduated from Withrow and majored in engineering at the University of Cincinnati, graduating in 1964. As an engineering student at U.C. he was a co-op intern at Texas Instruments in Dallas, Texas, alternating school and work terms. The engineering courses were too “Here is how you do it,” so he switched his major to

mathematics. Tom continued his higher education at The Ohio State University. While there he served as a mathematics assistant, and graduated with a doctorate in mathematics in 1969 with a specialty in probability. While there he taught on a teaching assistantship.

After graduating from O.S.U. he joined the mathematics department at Bowling Green State University in 1969. Besides probability and statistics, his interests included linear algebra and computer graphics. The latter was the result of spending the years 1982-1984 as a visiting professor in the computer science department at the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill working in a molecular graphics project. His scholarship served as the bedrock for strong teaching.

At BGSU, in 1977 and again in 1986, he was recognized for “Excellence in Teaching Mathematics” by students in Kappa Mu Epsilon, the undergraduate mathematics honorary. He was nominated four times for a university-wide Master Teacher Award.

Throughout his career he was involved in the Ohio Section of the Mathematical Association of America. He attended most of their semi-annual meetings and gave talks at many of them, always encouraging colleagues and students to participate. By 1992 Tom was promoted to “Professor”.

Tom served the Ohio Section as Program Committee Chair (1985-1986); President (1993-1994); Governor (2003-2006); the Newsletter Editor (1997-2002) and the Section’s first Webmaster (1995-2003). Teaming up with a noted math colleague, Tom was a Co-Developer of the Ohio Masters of Mathematics on-line collection of biographies, designed to foster public understanding and appreciation of mathematics as a human endeavor and Ohio’s contributions to that enterprise. He also wrote a history of the Ohio MAA.

In addition to his excellent teaching record, Dr. Hern extended his influence beyond his institution through his publishing of numerous mathematical articles in the College Mathematics Journals and MAA Notes series.

After teaching full-time for twenty-nine years, Tom retired in 1998. He was awarded the Mathematical Association of America (MAA) Ohio Section Award for Distinguished College or University Teaching of Mathematics that year, and in 2004 received the MAA Certificate for Meritorious Service.

Dr. Fred Rickey shared his memories of his colleague, Tom Hern. *“Tom Hern was a teacher par excellence. For twenty-nine years he taught a wide variety of mathematics courses at Bowling Green State University. He loved teaching and his students loved him. Tom spent untold hours with them, often long into the evening, helping them, encouraging them, and serving as a mentor”.*

John Zimmerman, former student at Bowling Green State University and Mathematics Professor at W & J College, has special memories that he shared of Tom Hern. *“All I can tell you is that he was a wonderful mathematics professor who truly cared about his students. His interest in us went well beyond what was going on in the classroom. He cared about our professional development and wrote wonderful letters of recommendation so that we could establish a successful life after BG. In my case, I'm not sure why we connected, but I've always considered it a point of pride that my college math professor sent me Christmas cards. He would take the time out of his busy schedule to visit with me when our paths crossed at regional and national meetings, and he was a supporter throughout my career. I don't know if it would be possible to ever express my gratitude in a way that would capture what he meant to me. And, I can say that my affections for Tom are not isolated. He was beloved by many students! I just happen to be one data point in his sparkling career.”*

In his leisure time, he enjoyed reading, photography, classical music concerts at the Toledo Peristyle and May Festival in Cincinnati. Tom felt a special connection to the May Festival because his Mother had sang in the festival when she was young. He loved New Orleans jazz and subscribed to the Toledo Symphony every year. When he was a teenager, his photography interest inspired him to build a dark room in his basement to develop his own black and white pictures. Tom was a great patron of Libraries, and enjoyed reading history and biographies of famous people in mathematics and history. At Bader family gatherings he followed in his grandparents' love of cards and would participate in games like bridge, euchre, gin rummy, and poker.

A regular globe trotter, Tom took trips abroad to Kenya/Tanzania, Egypt, China, Europe, England, and Ireland, [In 1983 he was a member of the MAA Delegation to the Peoples Republic of China.] During retirement, he enjoyed seeing Alaska, Hawaii, and

traveling by train within the United States and Canada, including a riverboat cruise down the Ohio River. Upon returning home, his family would enjoy slide shows of his travels.

During retirement, he enjoyed traveling by train within the United States and Canada and a riverboat cruise down the Ohio River. His interest in family history during the Sesquicentennial of the Civil War inspired him to write a book: *Devon To Andersonville: Four Hern Brothers in the American Civil War (2014)*. Since 2015, Tom assisted co-writing books on his maternal family history line with his cousin, Patricia Bader Stavovy: *The Ritchie and Moore Families of Cincinnati and Ludlow (2015)*; *The Stuntz Family Legacy (2017)*; *German Roots in Cincinnati: Bader, Quell, Dieckmann, u.s.w. (2018)*. His books were distributed to libraries in Cincinnati and Ludlow, Pennsylvania, DAR Library and Library of Congress, Allen County Library, State Libraries, historical societies, Cincinnati Fire Museum, and to family members and friends. He was a mentor to his cousin, Pat, and assisted her in editing and organizing two of her own family history books.

Tom, a resident of Perrysburg, Ohio since 1969, passed away at the age of 77 in Hospice Care in Toledo, Ohio. He died peacefully and was surrounded by loving family members during his final days. Tom's parents and younger brother, Steve, preceded him in death. He is survived by two nephews, Bryan (Staci) Hern and son, Noah; Kevin (Jennifer) and son Savvas.

Hern, Thomas A.

Ph.D., The Ohio State University. Professor; Probability, computer aided geometric design, computational linear algebra.

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