



## Obituary

## John Fenn: June 15, 1917–December 10, 2010

It was with great sadness and sense of loss that I learned of John Fenn's death December 10, 2010. John and I have been colleagues and friends for many years but only became close friends the past 15 years. As noted in the excellent Foreword written by Guest Editors Samy El Shall and David Muddiman, John had a fabulous career with many milestones. However, his real "coming out" party, in my opinion occurred when he gave his talk at ASMS in San Francisco in 1988 titled "Electrospray Ionization of Some Peptides and Small Proteins". While John had been developing ESI for a number of years it was this talk, with his beautiful spectra of cytochrome c, myoglobin and carbonic anhydrase that set the Mass Spectrometry Community on fire. I remember that meeting well. I was chairing a session on Ion Chemistry and Structure and, consistent with my M.O. at the time, not really keeping on schedule. John was in the back of the room and eventually raised his hand. He blasted the Chair for his lousy time keeping and informed all attending there were other talks they would miss if I didn't get my act in gear!! Needless to say some gear shifting took place and we were all able to attend John's talk later that day.

John was totally forthcoming about the importance of Malcolm Dole in the development of electrospray. I can personally attest to Dole's contributions. I was a graduate student at the University of Illinois in 1964 when Dole, then at Northwestern, gave a truly amazing talk about lifting large polyethylene glycol polymers into the gas phase and "resolving" them by flying them down a tube and detecting them with a Faraday Cup and electrometer. I had no idea at the time how important that seminal work would turn out to be. But it didn't take John long to figure it out once he got interested in upgrading the idea to interface with new technology from the burgeoning Mass Spectrometry industry.

John received the Nobel Prize for ESI in fall 2002. In August, 2003 he was invited, along with fellow Nobel laureate Koichi Tanaka, to give a plenary lecture at the Edinburgh International Mass Spectrometry Conference. Those who heard him talk will never forget it. His second slide was a simple rectangular box with a hole in one of the edges. There may have been one or two other things on the slide but basically it was just the box. After 45 min he was still on slide

2. Needless to say, the audience was getting a bit restless. I finally bailed out after an hour and fifteen minutes since I had to chair an ion mobility symposium. I'm not sure when the talk actually ended but at the Conference Dinner I sat next to John and the topic of his talk came up. He proudly said it was the first time he'd ever been invited to give a talk where there wasn't a fixed amount of time allotted!! I'm not sure the organizers would have agreed with his view but once John got rolling he went until he was done.

My last formal event with John was when I spoke at his 90th Birthday Symposium at Richmond in June 2007. I was connecting to Richmond through Chicago when I saw Yuan Lee in line to board the same flight. He said he'd just got off a flight from Taiwan and was heading for John's celebration. It was a real tribute to John that Yuan would fly all that way for a one-day event. For my own part, I remember doing a little "John Fenn" research before the meeting to include in my talk. You may be surprised but there are many famous John Fenn's in history. I narrowed it down to three for the talk: A Roman Catholic priest (1535–1615) who was a renowned translator; Sir John Fenn (1739–1974) an Antiquary in England who chronicled British life; and John Fenn (d 1723) a notable pirate immortalized on a Cayman Island Stamp – where he was shipwrecked in 1722. Our John Fenn was a little of each but also something more. He was a straight shooter, that sometimes shot from the hip, a tough adversary and competitor, but to me most importantly a true and faithful friend. I miss you John – and all of Mass Spectrometry misses you as well.

*Special Issues Consultant*

Michael T. Bowers\*

*Department of Chemistry, University of California,  
Santa Barbara, CA, USA*

\*Tel.: +1 895 893 2893; fax: +1 805 893 8703.

*E-mail address:* [bowers@chem.ucsb.edu](mailto:bowers@chem.ucsb.edu)

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