

IN MEMORIAM:

Silvio Bedini

JANUARY 17, 1917 - NOVEMBER 14, 2007



It is with deep sadness that we share the news of Silvio Bedini's passing with our readers and his long-time fans. A brilliant historian and decorated scholar, many instrument collectors and writers credit him for the inspiration that fueled their own passions and careers.

He was born in Ridgefield, Connecticut, the younger brother of Ferdinand and second son of Vincent and Cesira Stefanelli Bedini who had all immigrated there from Monterado, Italy in 1913. From the time he was a child, Silvio's insatiable curiosity about the world around him led to the ever-widening fields of discovery and research that would become the hallmarks of his life.

For my wife Jackie and I, Silvio's death is not only a professional loss, but a personal one as well. Over the many years we knew him, our association with Silvio and his devoted wife, Gale, led to a very special friendship. We were privileged to travel with them to the Surveyors' Rendezvous meetings in Luray, West Virginia and Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, and many were the wonderful meals we shared at DeCarlo's Restaurant in Washington, D.C., followed by lively after-dinner conversations in their home.

He told stories of his research (often conducted in tandem with family vacations) that led him far and wide, from overgrown graveyards, to ancient church and civil records, to the closely guarded files of the Vatican. He shared with us how his heart swelled with pride and tears filled his eyes as he approached the Smithsonian's handsome red brick "castle" on his first day of work as a curator in 1961. In time he became Deputy Director, and Keeper of Rare Books. Seeds for new books were planted as one type of research led to another. While Jackie was editing his collection of articles for *With Compass and Chain, Early American Surveyors and Their Instruments*, he treated her to a personal Smithsonian exhibit tour of clocks and horological instruments. The two of us also enjoyed a behind-the-scenes visit to the Smithsonian's vast collection of instruments that is far too vast for public display.

We never grew tired of his tales from a life that was as packed as the shelves of the Smithsonian itself. And some of those "shelves" held secrets that only came to light in August of 2007, when the National Park Service declassified information about a project he participated in at Fort Hunt in Washington, D.C. during WWII (for more information, visit www.nps.gov/archive/gwmp/fohu/).

A stickler for organization, both at his Smithsonian office and at home, Silvio cleaned off and organized his desk every

night so as to start fresh every morning. With a twinkle in his eye, he once drew our attention to the fact that he and Benjamin Franklin were born on the same day in January. If parallels could be drawn between Franklin and Bedini, certainly it was their unceasing industriousness and productivity. His daughter Leandra and son Peter told us that their father continued to work right up to the very end, with a three-ring binder on his hospital bed. He was finalizing the details of his last and perhaps greatest book yet, a biography on the life of Italian clockmaker Giuseppe Campani, a work that has been fifty years in the making.

Included on the back page of his memorial service program was "Epitaph on a Watchmaker," as referenced in his book *The Life of Benjamin Banneker*. The epitaph is inscribed on the grave lid of watchmaker George Routleigh that hangs on the wall of St. Petrock's Church in Lydford, England. (In another curious parallel, it may be noted that Silvio and Mr. Routleigh died on the same day in November.) The epitaph was adapted for Silvio as follows:

"Here lies in the horizontal position the outside *case* of Silvio Bedini, watchmaker, whose abilities in that line were an honour to his profession. Integrity was the *main-spring*, and prudence the *regulator* of all the *actions* of his life. Humane, generous and liberal, his *hand* never stopped till he had relieved distress. So nicely *regulated* were all his *movements* that he never *went wrong* except when *set-a-going* by people who did not know his *key*; even then, he was easily set right again. He had the art of disposing of his *time* so well that his *hours* glided away in one continual round of pleasure and delight, till an unlucky moment put a *period* to his existence. He departed this life November 14, 2007, aged 90; *wound up*, in hopes of being taken in hand by his *Maker*, and of being thoroughly *cleaned, repaired* and *set-a-going* in the World to come."

The land surveying community will forever be indebted to Silvio for the painstaking research and wealth of information he bequeathed to the profession by way of his many books and hundreds of published articles. We will miss him dearly.

Marc and Jackie Cheves