

WALTER MORRIS PERKINS
3-10-1913 to 8-26-1978

Walter Morris Perkins was born in Waterville, Maine, March 10, 1913, the youngest child of Charles and Lida Perkins. He grew up in New England and was educated at Rollins College and the University of Wisconsin, where he earned a Ph. D. in sociology and statistics.

He was a convinced Quaker since his first Meeting, during a hiking trip. He stopped at a Friends Meeting House because it was the first place he could rest, but he stayed a Quaker because he loved silent Worship. Although any member of a Meeting may speak whenever moved to do so, he spoke in Meeting only once in his life, to tell a true, ironic, and astonishing story. Afterward, someone rebuked him for it, and he was never moved to break the silence again.

Words were difficult for him anyway. He spoke gently and relatively seldom in groups. He often left sentences unfinished, and he wrote too carefully for his own comfort. A pacifist, he admired Gandhi and Martin Luther King, and he expressed his love for other people with action. Neighbors said he lived his religion.

He loved statistics, especially the mathematical theory of statistics and its application. Among these ideas he was at ease. He could explain statistical methods clearly to anyone willing to listen, and he could solve statistical problems creatively. But he preferred to do statistics rather than to write and publish, so he was not as well known as he might have been otherwise.

He worked briefly for the Tennessee Valley Authority, then for the Department of Health, Education and Welfare, and came to the Bureau of the Census on 1957. His work improved the 1960, 1970, and future censuses in the United States and in other countries. One of his contributors to the theory of sample surveys was the invention of the "Perkins stopping rule," a solution to a difficult problem in statistics that had defeated other statisticians. After his retirement in 1972, the Bureau of the Census sent him to Saudi Arabia to design evaluation studies for the 1974 Saudi Arabian Census. He served as a consultant to Westat, Incorporated, in Rockville, on quality assurance programs and sample surveys, making innovative contributions to the design of a national sample survey of registered nurses shortly before his death.

His other passions were bridge, chess, Eastern mystical philosophies, and humor. Humor was one kind of word-play he enjoyed and mastered. He joked in the hospital so as not to worry his family. He died of a heart attack on August 26, 1978, a gentle, kind man.