

NEWS

History of Nuclear Physics explored at first conference

Some physicists who are also major contributors to the development of nuclear physics met with historians, philosophers and sociologists at the first Exploratory Conference on the History of Nuclear Physics held on 18th and 19th May, 1967, at the headquarters of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in Brooklyn, Massachusetts, U.S.A. The conference was the culmination of the first stage to develop new research techniques and to identify source materials that will make possible serious studies of the initiation and growth of several fields of contemporary physics. The selection criteria for these fields include especially rapid development since 1930 and social impact within the physics community and on the larger social environment.

Prior to the conference a study paper, based on research in the published literature and on thirteen oral history interviews, was prepared and distributed to the participants in order to provoke and stimulate discussion. Three major themes were discussed at the conference: the initiation of nuclear physics as a major field of research; the interaction of theory and experiment; and the postwar development of the field.

In addition the usefulness of the oral history interviews was evaluated and suggestions for future work were proposed.

Nearly half of the 25 conference participants were nuclear physicists and half were either historians, philosophers or sociologists of science. Five of the physicists were among those interviewed thus for in the project. Significant insights into the social and intellectual processes of recent scientific change were obtained, new source materials were identified and several specific historical and sociological studies were suggested.

It is understood that a full report on this initial conference will be issued in the near future.

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