

Margaret King Robinson Biography

Deborah Day

Scripps Institution of Oceanography Archives

January 31, 2002



Margaret King Robinson, April 26, 1953

Margaret King Robinson was born in Provo, Utah, February 23, 1906, the youngest of four children of Samuel Andrew King, an attorney, and Maynetta Bagley King. She was raised in Salt Lake City.

Robinson received a B.A. with honors from the University of Utah in 1928 and traveled extensively in Europe between July 1923 and September 1925. She majored in French and German. She attended the University of California from 1928-1930. She attended Business College in Casper, Wyoming in 1930 and took courses in education at San Diego State College in 1943. She began taking classes at the Scripps Institution of Oceanography in February 1947 and received a M.S. degree from UCLA based on graduate work at Scripps in 1951.

Robinson moved from Salt Lake City to La Jolla, California in 1943 and worked as a tool designer at Consolidated-Vultee Aircraft Company until the war ended. She taught junior high school in Pacific Beach for a year. She joined the staff of the Scripps Institution of Oceanography in 1946 as a clerk in the Bathythermograph Unit.

The bathythermograph (BT) is an instrument invented by Athelstan Spilhuus in 1937 to measure submarine ocean temperatures. BT data had significant military value, and beginning in World War II, the U.S. Navy installed BTs in the submarine fleet. In 1945 the Scripps Institution of Oceanography established a Bathythermograph Unit to process BT data under navy contract. The BT unit was largely staffed by women. Robinson advanced to laboratory technician in 1947 and senior engineering aid in 1949. She became an assistant oceanographer in 1952 and held that rank for a decade. She was ranked as Associate Specialist Oceanographer in 1962 and advanced to specialist in 1969. She headed the Bathythermograph Unit beginning in February 1957. The work of the unit was supported by grants from the Office of Naval Research until 1961. Mrs. Robinson also received large grants from the U.S. Naval Oceanographic Office for the digitization of BT observations. In 1960, Robinson began receiving grant support from the National Science Foundation, which continued until 1974. She retired from the Scripps Institution of Oceanography on October 1, 1973.

Robinson was expert in processing, analyzing and archiving bathythermograph data. She was a pioneer in the use of computers to analyze world-wide oceanographic data. She lectured widely on bathythermograph data, and traveled throughout the world to scientific meetings.

Robinson married James P. McCeney in 1932 and lived in Washington, D.C.; they divorced in 1937. She married Arthur Goodwin Robinson May 24, 1937. He died in 1966. She had two children, a daughter, Renan Suhl and a son, Dr. Creighton H. Robinson.

Robinson served as a consultant to industry and scientific organizations. She was a member of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, the American Geophysical Union, the Arctic Institute of America, Phi Kappa Phi, and many other organizations. UNESCO appointed her technical expert in the hydrographic department of the Thai Royal Navy 1962-1963 where she advised the government of Thailand on oceanography, just after the Scripps Institution of Oceanography Naga Expedition (1959-1961) which explored the Gulf of Thailand.