

Symposium on the History of Technology: Past, Present, and Future  
 Massachusetts Institute of Technology  
 Program in Science, Technology, and Society (STS)  
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## *INTRODUCTION*

Welcome, everybody. As Director of the Program in Science, Technology, and Society, I want to officially welcome you to the Symposium, and also to MIT more generally.

It's so wonderful to see so many old friends and, you know, people that we've known for decades and have seen off and on for a very long time.

It's great to see you all here today and great to see our students who have gone out, become professionals, and have come back as the people we hoped they would be. And it's just thrilling. It never gets old to see your students come back in this way.

I want to say a few words about Roe Smith, which he didn't bargain on, truthfully. Roe is at the center of this Symposium, obviously, and it is his work as a historian, a mentor, and yes, even an administrator that deserves some mention today.

Although he has been very firm in his view that we don't do this but stick to the Symposium about the history and the future of the History of Technology, I'm his boss, see. So I'm going to go ahead and do what I want to do, which is to say a few words about him. Because it is hard to imagine the organization of the History of Technology without Roe. He has been a towering presence in the field for a very, very long time. So I'm going to say a few things. I'll try to make it brief, but just buckle in, Roe.

So Roe, as you know, attended Georgetown for his undergraduate degree and he went on to Penn State University, where he got his Ph.D. He came to MIT in 1978 after teaching at Ohio State and also the University of Pennsylvania.

At MIT, he served as the Director of Graduate Studies [HASTS], as a Department Head [STS] more than once -- I don't know how many times, actually. And also, he was head of one of the big undergraduate dorms called Burton-Connor with his wife, Bronwyn, for many, many years.

He was central to the creation of the Doctoral Degree Program in the STS Department in 1987, serving as its first/founding Director. (I'm saying '87, but the first class came in '88.) And he played a lead role in bringing History and Anthropology into it as players. In the early years Roe worked tirelessly to raise money to support the students.

This is something people don't really know about the program, actually, in my experience. In those days, there was very little funding coming from the Institute, and fundraising was really nonstop. I don't mean everyone was fundraising; I mean that he, Ken Keniston, Loren Graham, Leo Marx, one or two others off and on really worked all the time trying to fund this program that

we had and were super excited about. Most of the students and the Junior faculty like me were completely oblivious to this, but we would not be here today if Roe and others did not make this a tip-top priority.

Roe was also instrumental in several really crucial events in the program. One was the creation of the Dibner Institute, a truly wonderful operation that brought scholars of the History of Science and Technology to MIT every year for about 10 years and provided Doctoral Fellowships to many of our students.

Behind the scenes, there was a fair amount of challenging stuff going on, but Roe's leadership made it work beautifully for so many historians. And I have to say many of you were Dibner Fellows. How many of you here were Dibner Fellows? Yeah, that's a lot. It was a great time. It was a really wonderful time in the program, and everybody made so many new scholarly friends through that.

Another huge contribution was Roe's work with Svante Lindquist at the KTH Royal Institute of Technology in Stockholm to create an annual graduate student exchange between our two programs. Several former students who are here today took part in that program, and at the faculty level, there was also some visiting back and forth. I was one of the ones who went back and forth. I know Roz and a number of the faculty did go there.

Not only was this a fantastic exchange of historical knowledge and methodology -- and that was really important, the methodological differences between our programs -- but it created friendships that survive to this day. I really hope that future leaders in STS -- Eden Medina -- will find a way to recreate something like this in the future; in Sweden or who knows where.

Roe, of course, had a slew of Doctoral students over the course of his career, and I want to note that his first students were not actually in the STS Program because it wasn't -- well, for a lot of reasons. Lindy Biggs, Colleen Dunlavy, Steve Reber, Dave Guston were all from the Political Science Department. Sarah Wermiel is from the Urban Studies and Planning Department, Ken Alder was from Harvard's History of Science Department, and there were many others -- actually, two -- who would drift in and out without having Roe as one of their primary advisors. Altogether, it's quite a long list of people who Roe was working with in those days.

Within the Society for the History of Technology, Roe also cut quite a wide swath. He served as President and received the Da Vinci Medal, SHOT's highest award, in 1994. He served on countless committees and attended the annual meetings pretty religiously until recently. He was always a warm and engaging presence at the meetings, giving papers, commenting, and offering encouragement to young faculty and students alike. I benefitted from that myself.

And finally, Roe was a scholar, most importantly, of American History, and especially of the Civil War. His first book on Harper's Ferry Armory was an instant classic and won the distinguished Frederick Jackson Turner Award from the organization of American Historians in 1977.

Roe's treatment of the American system of manufacturing in the context of war was required reading for generations of history students and had an enormous impact on several fields of history, continuing to do so.

He had many other publications, including serving as editor of *Military Enterprise and Technological Change*. He worked with Leo Marx to publish *Does Technology Drive History?*

which, again, came out of a symposium with Greg Clancey. With Greg, he wrote *Major Problems in the History of American Technology* in 1998. With Pauline Maier, Dan Kevles, and Alex Keyssar, he wrote the textbook *Inventing America*, which came out first in 2003 and at least one edition after that, as well.

Roe's love of history and his scholarly output has forever changed the way scholars look at the role of technology in America, and has inspired many, many history students to search out the most important and the most intriguing problems from what the past has to offer.

In all of his roles: teacher, scholar, institution builder, mentor, academic leader, Roe had a winning hand. And that is also why we are here today. He really wants this Symposium to be about history, but it is also about those who make history, like Roe Smith.

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