

Seeley, Walter James ^[1]

Seeley, Walter James

by [C. Sylvester Green](#) ^[2], 1994

30 Nov. 1894–29 July 1974

Walter James Seeley, electrical engineer and engineering educator, was born at Hazelton, Pa., the son of Frank Wesley and Mame Seaborne Seeley. In 1913 he was graduated from the [Polytechnic Institute of Brooklyn](#) ^[3], where he received a degree in electrical engineering in 1917. He earned a master's degree in physics from the [University of Pennsylvania](#) ^[4] in 1924 and spent the next two years at [Columbia University](#) ^[5] for special study in engineering. Beginning as an instructor in electrical engineering at the University of Pennsylvania in 1919, he was promoted to a full professor in 1929 and to chairman of the department in 1935. In 1953 he became dean of the College of Engineering at [Duke University](#) ^[6] in [Durham](#) ^[7] and one of the original group of fourteen faculty members named to a James B. Duke Professorship.



Heads of the divisions of the Engineering School seated at table, *from left to right*, Walter J. Seeley, Electrical Engineering Department; Harold C. Bird, Civil Engineering Department; and Ralph S. Wilbur, Mechanical Engineering Department.

Image of Walter James Seeley (left), with Harold C. Bird (middle) and Ralph S. Wilbur (right), from Duke University's *The Chanticleer* yearbook 1953, [p.21], published 1953 by Duke University. Presented on Digital NC.

^[8]

Following his graduation from the Polytechnic Institute, Seeley was commissioned an ensign in the U.S. Navy and worked on antisubmarine devices from 1917 to 1919. For six months he also served at the Navy Radio School at [Harvard University](#) ^[9]. Throughout his teaching career he frequently served as a consultant to municipalities, public utility agencies, and private companies. Among them were Trenton, N.J., for street lighting design; Cheltn Electric Company, Frankford Machine Company, and Gardner and Hepburn, all of Philadelphia, for design of radio equipment; and American Telephone and Telegraph Company, Duke Power Company, Fairchild Airplane and Engine Company, and others for various consultations.

During [World War II](#) ^[10] he was stationed intermittently (June 1941–September 1944) at the U.S. Naval Ordnance Laboratory in Washington, D.C. He also assisted in the organization of the Technical Reserve and was a consultant on the staff of the technical director until 1946. Professionally, he was a member of the American Institute of Electrical Engineers (chairman, North Carolina Section, 1936–37), Institute of Radio Engineers, American Society for Engineering Education, National Society of Professional Engineers, Professional Engineers of North Carolina, Naval Ordnance Technical Reserve (first president), and others. By gubernatorial appointment he was a member of the North Carolina State Board of Registration for Professional Engineers and Land Surveyors.

As a resident of Durham he was active with the chamber of commerce, served on a working committee of the Research Triangle Park, and was a trustee of Durham Technical Institute. As a member of the Duke Memorial Methodist Church, he taught a Bible class in the Sunday school and served several terms on the official board of the church.

He contributed to such professional publications as *Radiofax* (editor, 1925–31), *Journal of the American Institute of Electrical Engineers*, *Journal of Engineering Education*, *The Mathematics Teacher*, and *Electric Light and Power*. Among his books were *Manual of Direct Current and Alternating Current Circuit Experiments* ^[11] (1932), *Impedence Computing Tables* ^[12] (1936), and *Introduction to the Operational Calculus* ^[13] (1941).

In 1920 Seeley married Emetta Susan Weed, and they became the parents of three children: Carolyn Ada (Mrs. H. A. Scott, Jr.), Mary Elizabeth (Mrs. James R. Hill, Jr.), and Naomi Ruth (Mrs. B. A. Ross). He was buried in Maplewood Cemetery, Durham.

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