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Herbert B Michaelson

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Herbert B. Michaelson, who passed away last year, was a major figure in the histories of the IEEE Professional Communication Society (PCS) and the Society for Technical Communication (STC), joining both groups in the 1950s and remaining active in them for decades. He worked as a full-time editor and manager in industry for almost 40 years. As a scholar, he had an extensive publication record (see [bibliography](#)). Few practitioners or academics in technical communication have been as productive or active as he was for so many years.

Herbert Bernard Michaelson was born in Washington, D.C. on December 29, 1916, the son of Samuel and Minnie Michaelson. His parents had emigrated from Russia in the 1890s, becoming citizens by 1900. Herbert grew up with two older sisters and a younger brother in a bilingual environment: Yiddish and English. He attended primary and secondary schools in Baltimore and New York.

From 1943 to 1946, he served in the US Army Signal Corps, specializing in microwave radio communications. He attended Temple University (1943), Polytechnic Institute of Brooklyn (c. 1950), and eventually New York University, earning a B.A. in physics in 1955. He worked as a technical editor for Sylvania (1946-1956) and IBM (1956-1984). For many years, he was an associate editor of the IBM Journal of Research and Development. After his retirement in the mid-1980s, he continued to work part-time as a technical communication consultant.

Michaelson was also a photographer and had a one-artist show at a gallery in the mid-1970s. The New York Art Yearbook described his work as "Wall constructions that combine large black-and-white photographs with mechanical audio devices. The sounds, activated by the viewer, are appropriate to the visual images. For example, a blow-up of an old table radio has a plastic knob, which is turned to play back a segment from the Lone Ranger; or in a picture of a car interior, a horn is sounded by pushing a button on the steering wheel."

Contributions to PCS

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Writing and Speech (PGEWS), the ancestor of PCS. Although he did not attend the founders' meeting on March 19, 1957, he did attend several planning meetings prior to the official formation of the group in May 1957.

- He was the group's first treasurer, serving from 1957 to 1960.
- At the group's first national symposium in New York City in October 1957, he participated in a panel discussion titled "Should a Talk Be Read from a Prepared Manuscript?"
- He was the second editor of the group's *Transactions*, serving from April 1960 to December 1961.
- He served on the group's Administrative Committee for many years: 1958-1967, 1969-1971, and 1988-1989.
- He was the guest editor of the August 1968 issue of the *Transactions*.
- In 1990, he received PCS's Alfred N. Goldsmith Award for Distinguished Contributions to Engineering Communication.
- He joined IRE in 1949 and remained a member of IRE/IEEE for about 60 years. He was a life senior member of IEEE when he passed away on February 13, 2009.

Contributions to STC

- The Association of Technical Writers and Editors (TWE), founded in 1953, was one of the three groups that eventually became STC. Although Michaelson was not a charter member of TWE, he was active in the organization as early as 1955.
- At the December 1955 TWE Conference, he participated in a seminar on "Training the Technical Writer."
- He was one of five contributing editors of the Fall 1956 issue of the *TWE Journal*.
- He was program chairman of the 15th ITCC in 1968 and a frequent session moderator at later ITCCs.
- He vetted manuscripts for the *STWP Journal* and *Technical Communication*, and was the guest editor of a special issue of *Technical Communication* (24.4) in 1977.
- A Fellow of STC, he served on many STWP and STC national committees as well as the organization's Board of Directors.
- He was active in STC's New York Metro chapter and won STC's Distinguished Chapter Service Award in 1998.

Other Contributions

- In the mid-1950s, he was national vice president of the short-lived Technical Writing Improvement Society.
- He taught non-credit courses in technical writing at such institutions as Yale University and New York University.
- He wrote an influential book, *How to Write and Publish Engineering Papers and Reports*, which went through three editions (1982, 1986, 1990).

Michaelson Bibliography

Herbert B. Michaelson, a charter member of PCS who passed away last year, left behind an impressive record of publications, including two books and at least 40 full-length journal articles. The bibliography below was an attempt to compile a complete list of Michaelson's publications. It is at least nearly complete.

Books

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