

Dedication of the Cancer Statistics Review: 1973-1999
Dr. Peter Isacson

Dr. Peter Isacson, former Principal Investigator of the Iowa SEER Program, died on June 16, 2000 in Silver City, New Mexico. Peter was born on January 31, 1927 in Omaha, Nebraska. He received an M.D. degree from the University of Nebraska in 1955. From 1954 to 1956, he was an epidemic intelligence service officer for the Centers for Disease Control. A three-year stint of residency and fellowship training in medicine followed. From 1959 to 1966, he was a junior faculty member at Yale University. From 1966 to 1972, he was a faculty member at the State University of New York at Buffalo where he was quite successful with the Vaccine Evaluation Unit, a mixture of applied public health and applied laboratory studies of both the wild viruses to be conquered and the modified viruses used in vaccines. In 1972 Peter moved his family to Iowa City, Iowa where he became Professor and Head of the Department of Preventive Medicine. His skills and vision led to great progress in the Department as the size of the faculty grew and the scope of their research, service, and teaching increased. Peter's own interests changed from infectious disease to chronic disease, especially the study of the causes of cancer. He was particularly interested in drinking water supplies and cancer risk, and wrote several papers related to the contents of municipal water supplies in Iowa and the cancer rates in those municipalities. Peter's interest in cancer led him in 1977 to become Principal Investigator of the Iowa SEER Program, a position he held until planning his retirement in 1990. Peter was deeply appreciative of the SEER Program and what it meant to him, his Department, the University and the state of Iowa. Peter remained as Department Head until 1984 and thereafter served as Head of the Division of Epidemiology until his retirement.

It was always a pleasure to work with Peter as he had a combination of interesting characteristics that were quite attractive to others. Peter read a lot, and had the amazing ability to recall the clever jokes and quips he read, so he was always most entertaining in general conversation, in part because he was able to remember the jokes the rest of us always forgot. Faculty appreciated the warmth and advice received from Peter, as well as his support. Peter also had a strong sense of public responsibility and dedication to family.

In the early 1990s Peter retired from the University of Iowa and moved to Silver City, New Mexico to be closer to his grandchildren. Ruth, Peter's wife for over 50 years, died in 1996. Peter is survived by three children, several grandchildren, and a host of others who grew to adore his colorful personality.