

A. Ross Eckler, Jr.

August 29, 1927 – December 9, 2016

A. Ross Eckler, born in Boston, MA 8/29/27; d. 12/9/2016. Graduated in 1950 from Swarthmore College with high honors. He received his PhD in Mathematics in 1954 from Princeton University. He was employed by Bell Telephone Laboratories for 30 years, retiring in 1985. He married Faith L. Woodward in 1951. In 1970 he embarked on a second career as the editor and publisher of *Word Ways*, a small quarterly journal devoted to logology, a word coined by Dmitri Borgman to describe recreational wordplay and letterplay. During the next 40 years he became a world authority on this topic, creating a number of new ways to juggle words and letters into patterns. He wrote several books on the subject, including *Making the Alphabet Dance*, published by St. Martin's Press in 1996. Devoted to outdoor pastimes, he became interested in spelunking in 1950 and hiking in 1964. For many years he and his wife hiked in many of the major mountain chains in the US and also the British Isles, as well as NJ and NY. Among his volunteer activities was serving as Carillonneur for 30 years at St. Peter's Church in Morristown. He is survived by his wife and three daughters: Margaret Malishchak of Madison, NJ, Lois Day of Sterling, VA and Susan Eckler-Kerns of West Milford, NJ and five grandchildren.

He was also the author of *The National Puzzlers' League, The First 115 Years*, a history of the National Puzzlers' League (NPL). He and his wife Faith were married for more than 50 years, and are former NPL editors under the collective nom de plume "Faro" (with variant forms "FAro" for Faith and "faRO" for Ross).

THE NATIONAL PUZZLERS' LEAGUE

The First 115 Years

A. ROSS ECKLER (faRO)

A. Ross Eckler



Founded 1883

The world's oldest puzzlers' organization

INTRODUCTION

Sure, tell the story, but tell it well—
Let the tale be told, and doubts dispel
That calm was the course, the way all fair,
Nor shoals nor breakers were lurking there!
Tell of the Worker, though now forgot;
Tell of the Shirker, who failed his lot;
Tell of the Wrecker, though he be dead,
He who was traitor and fain misled
A Krewe all hopeful and keen to go—
Aye! tell the tale well, let Thedom know!
—Primrose, *The Enigma*, October 1939

He also wrote with Stefan A. Burr *Mathematical Models of Target Coverage and Missile Allocation*, 1972, Military Operations Research Society. This earned Ross an Erdős number of 2 and both authors reflected in the book's "Historical Note":

HISTORICAL NOTE

The art of projecting missiles is very old, dating back at least to the Roman ballista, but it was placed on a scientific footing until the sixteenth century, when the Italian mathematician Niccolo Fontana Tartaglia studied the trajectories of missiles fired from weapons ranging from pistols to cannon. As the first mathematician to optimize the aim of a weapon one might call him the prototype of the modern missile analyst. Yet his knowledge was purchased at a price, as revealed by the following passage toward the end of the dedication in his Nova Scientia Inventa (1537):

"But then in reflecting one day it struck me as blameworthy, infamous, and cruel, and meriting no small punishment before God, to wish to refine an art so injurious to one's fellow men — a vile destroyer of the human race, and especially of Christians in their incessant warfare."

Similar misgivings about the social consequences of scientific work devoted to war have been expressed ever since, culminating in the angst of the atomic scientists after World War II. The authors of this monograph are not immune; but our concern has been tempered by the hope that a quantitative understanding of missile defense strategies may actually reduce the probability of international conflict. At the very least, this monograph should discourage any naive belief that a perfect defense is possible.

Eckler's hobbies were genealogy and supercentenarian research. Eckler disproved exaggerated age claims such as those of Charlie Smith and George Fruits while authenticating others such as Delina Filkins (1815–1928).

Word Ways has already received several tributes from readers and these and others will be published in the next few issues.