

## **Bill Watson's Unusual Career Path To The Beginning of Modern Astrochemistry**

Lewis E. Snyder  
Department of Astronomy  
University of Illinois

Bill Watson received his secondary education in the 1950's in Camden, a small town in rural Alabama. He attended one of the many segregated high school academies which existed in the south during that period. Much emphasis was placed on varsity sports such as football and basketball and Bill was proficient in both. In fact he was named an all state guard in football, which is no minor achievement in Alabama. Having absorbed all of those punishing blocks and bruising tackles, at this point in his life it is not clear why he didn't just finish high school, graduate from some southern university, and spend the rest of his career as a prominent lawyer or banker in the south. There was little indication that he would go on to graduate from MIT with a PhD in physics and start a postdoctoral career at Cornell which would lead to a joint appointment in the Astronomy Dept. and the Physics Dept. at the University of Illinois. This career path led to basic contributions to the beginning of modern astrochemistry and important insights into gravitational lensing and maser theory. Not only was Bill known for his innovative and careful research, but throughout his career, he gained a reputation as a kind and compassionate person. In this tribute session, the speakers will lead the listeners through many of the high points of Bill's research career. We hope to inspire both graduate students and young faculty members by reviewing some of the major accomplishments of this outstanding scientist.