

**BONNER, Harriet (Rees).** July 16, 1914–June 28, 1978.

ROCKFORD COLLEGE (BA 1934), UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO (MS 1935, PhD 1937).

Harriet Rees was born in Mt. Morris, Illinois, the daughter of Wilhelmina (Mina) Marie (Middour) (1883–1955), of Illinois, and Vernon Victor Rees (1882–1956), a native of Iowa, who married in about 1911. Her only sibling, a brother, died as an infant. She grew up on a farm near Mt. Morris, where her father was farming in 1920. In 1930 her father worked in the bindery of a printing plant.

Rees received her elementary and secondary education in the public schools of Mt. Morris and attended nearby Rockford College from 1930 to 1934. At Rockford she was a member of the classical club, the Socratic honor society, and the orchestra. She received a BA with honors in mathematics and a diploma in piano in 1934. She began her graduate work at the University of Chicago in October of 1934 and continued her work there until June 1937 when she received her doctorate. She was a Talcott fellow from Rockford College 1934–35. At Chicago she studied under [Mayme Irwin Logsdon](#), among others, and wrote her master's thesis in number theory under Leonard Eugene Dickson and her PhD dissertation in a related area in abstract algebra under A. Adrian Albert.

Rees was appointed instructor of mathematics at the University of Utah in 1937 and remained there a year and a half before resigning in December 1938. While there she was a member of Sigma Delta Epsilon for graduate women in science. She was married on January 1, 1939, to James Fredrick Bonner (1910–1996), the son of the chairman of the chemistry department at Utah. Bonner had received his PhD from the California Institute of Technology in 1934 and became a distinguished molecular biologist. He was on the faculty at Caltech from 1935 until 1981 and was elected a member of the National Academy of Sciences. The Bonners were divorced in 1966, and James Bonner remarried the following year.

The Bonners had two children, both born in Los Angeles: a daughter, Joey, born June 10, 1948, and a son James José, born May 1, 1950. Both children later earned PhD's, Joey in Chinese intellectual history from Harvard, and J. José in biology from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Before their children were born the Bonners were serious climbers. In October 1947 they were awarded emblem status by the Desert Peaks Section of the Sierra Club for having climbed fifteen peaks, including five of the seven designated emblem peaks.

During the 1940s and 1950s Harriet Bonner worked with her husband and his colleagues and received thanks for her mathematical analyses in several publications in biology. She coauthored one paper with James Bonner and another with A. J. Haagen-Smit, an authority on air pollution, who was later elected a member of the National Academy of Sciences.

Harriet Bonner taught mathematics at the continuation high school in Pasadena from 1968 until 1975. She was also an excellent pianist and studied piano and voice at Pasadena City College. She developed symptoms of Alzheimer's disease and was eventually moved to San Francisco, where she died in 1978, shortly before her sixty-fourth birthday.

**Organizational affiliations:** AMS, Sigma Xi.

**Thesis and dissertation:**

**1935** [Rees, H.] Quartic functions available for Waring theorems. MS thesis, University of Chicago, directed by Leonard Eugene Dickson. Typescript.

**1937** [Rees, H.] Ideals in cubic and certain quartic fields. PhD dissertation, University of Chicago, directed by Abraham Adrian Albert. Private edition, distributed by the University of Chicago Libraries.

**Publications:**

**1942** With A. J. Haagen-Smit. Poisonous plants in California. *News Letter Plant Culture League* 4. Reprint: *Lasca Leaves* 17, no. 1 (Jan. 1967): 1–6.

**1948** With J. Bonner. The B vitamins as plant hormones. In *Vitamins and Hormones*, ed. R. S. Harris and K. V. Thimann, 6:225–75. New York: Academic Press. Review of book: *Q. Rev. Biol.* 25:259–40 (E. Howard).

**Other sources:** MS thesis vita 1935; PhD dissertation vita 1937; communications with J. José Bonner (1992, 1998), Rockford College Archives, University of Utah Archives, California Arboretum Foundation; [Desert Peaks Section](#), [Sierra Club](#); US Census 1920, 1930 IL.

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