

The First Ph.D. in Mathematics from an American University

Arthur Williams Wright¹ was born on September 8, 1836, in Lebanon, Connecticut. He received his Yale College BA in 1859 and his Ph.D. in 1861, the year Yale became the first American university to award this degree. He served as a Yale College tutor in Latin from 1863 to 1866 and in natural philosophy from 1866 to 1868. Wright was an instructor in physics from 1867 to 1868. He furthered his studies with a year at Heidelberg and Berlin. In 1871 he was appointed professor of molecular physics and chemistry at Yale, and in 1878, professor of experimental physics, a position he held until his retirement in 1906. In addition to his academic appointments, Wright was a consultant to the U. S. Signal Service, 1881-1886; the Annual Assay Commission in 1887; and a member of the party sent out by the United States Naval Observatory in the summer of 1878 to observe the total eclipse of the sun. In 1876, he observed for the first time the occurrence of gases in stony meteorites, analyzed them as those of iron meteorites, and investigated their spectra and the relation of these to the spectra of comets. Following the discovery of X-rays in 1895, he was the first American to obtain results from using X-rays. Wright was married to Susan Forbes Silliman. He died in New Haven on December 19, 1915. The Arthur W. Wright Nuclear Structure Laboratory on the Yale campus is named for him.

Footnote:

¹ This biographical note is taken from Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library:
<http://orbis.library.yale.edu/vwebv/holdingsInfo?searchId=7027&recCount=10&recPointer=1&bibId=7054470&searchType=7>