

John Trojanowski, Pathology & Laboratory Medicine

MARCH 1, 2022 | VOL 68 ISSUE 25 ([HTTPS://ALMANAC.UPENN.EDU/VOLUME-68-NUMBER-25](https://almanac.upenn.edu/volume-68-number-25)) | DEATHS | PRINT



John Trojanowski

John Q. Trojanowski, the William Maul Measey-Truman G. Schnabel, Jr. Professor of Geriatric Medicine and Gerontology in the department of pathology and laboratory medicine in the Perelman School of Medicine, passed away on February 8. He was 75.

Dr. Trojanowski was born in Bridgeport, CT, and was one of seven children. His father was a Captain in the U.S. Air Force and Dr. Trojanowski grew up attending military schools as his family moved frequently to various Air Force Bases in the U.S. and overseas. After graduating from high school, he majored in German at Kings College before receiving his medical and doctoral degrees at Tufts University School of Medicine. He completed graduate training in Rotterdam, then returned to the U.S. for his residency in neuropathology at Massachusetts General and Harvard Medical School. He met his wife, Virginia Man-Yee Lee, in Massachusetts

and they moved to Pennsylvania after Dr. Lee was offered a job at a Philadelphia pharmaceutical company in 1979. Dr. Trojanowski joined Penn's faculty in 1981.

Dr. Trojanowski shared his scientific and personal life with Dr. Lee, who became the John H. Ware 3rd Endowed Professor in Alzheimer's Research in the department of pathology and laboratory medicine at Penn, also in 1981. Their findings identifying different forms of the tau protein opened up new avenues of research in neurodegenerative diseases. Little was known about Alzheimer's disease in the 1980s, and senior faculty advised Drs. Trojanowski and Lee to steer clear of the topic, considered a career killer. They and their colleagues at Penn went on to make a series of groundbreaking discoveries showing that the aggregation and cell-to-cell spread of specific disease proteins is a common mechanism underlying Alzheimer's and related disorders.

Over the decades, Drs. Trojanowski and Lee's evolving research program kept Penn at the forefront in the field. The patient-oriented focus of their extensive basic and clinical work helped to identify numerous targets for potential drug therapies and treatments. Their lab also got some of the first federal grant money to open an Alzheimer's Disease Research Center, and there they began recruiting and training the next generations of scientists. Dr. Trojanowski helped establish and expand a robust network of aging-related research at Penn. In 1991, he became co-director with Dr. Lee of the Center for Neurodegenerative Disease Research. Eleven years later, Dr. Trojanowski was appointed director of the Penn Institute on Aging, which he helped shape into a model center, catalyzing a wide range of innovative work on aging and aging-related diseases across the entire Penn campus.

Beyond his far-reaching impact at Penn, Dr. Trojanowski also worked at the national and international level, promoting and advancing aging research, especially related to neurodegenerative diseases. In 1991, he became director of the National Institute on Aging (NIA) Alzheimer's Disease Center Core, and elsewhere in the NIA, he was active on the Board of Scientific Counselors, the National Advisory Council on Aging, and the Neuroscience, Behavior and Sociology of Aging Review Committee. Among many other national leadership positions, he served as president of the American Association of Neuropathologists. Dr. Trojanowski led the Biomarker Core of the Alzheimer's Disease Neuroimaging Initiative, a longitudinal study that has changed how patients are diagnosed. His pioneering research and transformative leadership helped to establish Penn as a leading center of research on aging-related neurodegenerative disease and helped make Penn one of the top institutions in the country receiving NIA funding. Programs he helped establish at Penn include the Marian S. Ware Alzheimer Program, the Penn Alzheimer's Disease Center, the Morris K. Udall Center of Excellence for Parkinson's Disease Research, and the NIA Penn U19 Center on Alpha-Synuclein Strains in Alzheimer's Disease and Related Dementias.

Over the course of his distinguished career, Dr. Trojanowski gained the respect of his peers across the country and around the world. Colleagues remember Dr. Trojanowski as a passionate scientist who was also extremely modest about his accomplishments, emphasizing the collaborative nature of his work and the teamwork that went into it. He received numerous awards and honors for his work, including election to the National Academy of Medicine in 2002 and the 2018 Alzheimer's Association Lifetime Achievement Award. Until nearly the end of his life, he was still writing grants and papers, and overseeing tens of millions of research dollars to better understand the many pathological proteins that he and his wife had identified or studied during their 45 years together. To read several fond remembrances of Dr. Trojanowski from friends and peers, visit <https://www.alzforum.org/news/community-news/john-trojanowski-75-giant-field-neuropathology> (<https://www.alzforum.org/news/community-news/john-trojanowski-75-giant-field-neuropathology>).

He is survived by his wife, Dr. Lee; and five siblings. Dr. Lee and his other colleagues are planning a memorial symposium on neurodegeneration in the fall.