

# Wendell K. Beckwith: His Life of Pi

BY CAROL NICHOLSON

THE EPITAPH of Philosopher René Descartes states: Putting together the mysteries of nature with the laws of mathematics, he dared to hope to be able to unlock the secrets of both with the same key. This is the story of Wendell Beckwith for whom such an epitaph could well have been written.

Wendell King Beckwith was born September 9, 1915, in Connecticut, USA, to parents Raymond Austen Beckwith and Laura Imogene King. Raymond worked in the 1920s as a mechanical engineer and, in the 1930s, as a Plant Superintendent for a 'Pavers and Mixers' company in Shorewood, Wisconsin.

Wendell attended one year at the University of Alabama, studying botany. He left because he wasn't permitted to take advanced classes in electronics. He went on to work for the Milwaukee Electric Tool Company, eventually becoming Chief Development Engineer. In 1945 he left, and opened an experimental and developmental laboratory in Whitewater, Wisconsin.

Through his lab, Beckwith worked with The Parker Pen Company, from the late 1940s until the mid 1950s. He developed methods of making a ball for ballpoint pens using sapphires. Beckwith is accredited with developing the 'T-Ball Jotter' pen, and has a number of patents in his name.



SUBMITTED PHOTO

**Wendell Beckwith, seen here in his cabin on Best Island, near Armstrong, has become something of a legend in Northwestern Ontario.**

Beckwith had a fascination with the number Pi, as well as concepts of magnetism and astronomical forces of the galaxy. He was also fascinated with Stonehenge, and human migration, which fueled his desire to seek solitude so he could conduct 'pure research'.

In 1956, Beckwith divorced his wife Betty and, leaving a trust for his five children, he became involved with the Gravity Institute in New Boston located in New Hampshire. While there, a United States government lab approached him to further their research on unidentified flying

objects, but he refused because it would have involved group research work. He wanted to work alone.

Beckwith went to Eagle River, Wisconsin,

where he met Harry Wirth, a wealthy businessman

who wanted to build a wilderness retreat in Northern Ontario. Wirth offered Beckwith the opportunity to develop a wilderness retreat. In 1961, Beckwith took up residence on Best Island, located 300 kilometers north of Thunder Bay, near Armstrong. Thus began his life in Northwestern Ontario, which we will learn more about next week.

*Looking Back is written weekly by one of various writers for the Thunder Bay Museum. For further information visit the museum at 425 Donald St. E., or view its website at [www.thunderbay-museum.com](http://www.thunderbay-museum.com).*

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