

## A sign of the time

February 1, 2017



There are not a lot of children who have determined their career before the age of 10, but for Norris Bradbury the writing was on the wall—or rather the sign—and he put it there himself. Born in 1909 in California, Norris Edwin Bradbury might have had an idea of what type of work he wanted to do, but he couldn't have had any idea where that interest in science and engineering would eventually take him. Bradbury ended up graduating from Pomona College in California with honors and later received a doctorate in mathematics from the University of California at Berkeley. He later became a research fellow at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and then an instructor at Stanford University. A [13-page profile](#) of him published by the National Academy of Sciences has this to say: *During the 1930s, Bradbury established a reputation as an expert on conduction of electricity in gases, properties of ions, and atmospheric electricity.* While on active duty during World War II, he worked at the Naval Proving Ground in Virginia until he was asked to transfer to the Los Alamos site of the Manhattan Project. In July 1944 he began work as head of the implosion field-test program. While here, he was in charge of all the non-nuclear components of Fat Man. He was also an important part of the historic Trinity Test at White Sands, New Mexico. As the war ended, most of the Los Alamos personnel, including Bradbury, looked forward to returning to their civilian roles. Asked by Oppenheimer to succeed

him, Bradbury initially stated he would do so only for a short time, according to the same biographical memoir: *He accepted the directorship with the proviso that he would hold it only for six months or until atomic energy legislation determining the future of Los Alamos, whichever came first. He soon found that the six months would be up long before such legislation was passed and put into effect.* He was the Lab's director for 25 years. He retired in 1970 and died in 1997 at age 88.

It is in his honor that the Bradbury Science Museum was named and, while director, he advocated for access to the unclassified Lab materials and information that formed the basis of this institution. If you would like to contribute artifacts from World War II Los Alamos to the Museum, contact Wendy Strohmeier at [wstrohmeier@lanl.gov](mailto:wstrohmeier@lanl.gov) for more information.

An orange banner with white text and graphics. On the left, it lists the address: "1350 Central Avenue Los Alamos, NM 87545". In the center, there is a stylized atomic symbol followed by the text "BRADBURY SCIENCE museum". On the right, it provides the phone number "(505) 667-4444" and the website "www.lanl.gov/museum".

1350 Central Avenue  
Los Alamos, NM 87545



BRADBURY **SCIENCE** museum

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[www.lanl.gov/museum](http://www.lanl.gov/museum)

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