

Robert E. Mitchell**Date of Death:** 12/1/2021

DACOR 12/2021: Robert "Bob" Edward Mitchell, 91, a retired Foreign Service officer, passed away peacefully on July 27 at his home in Brookline, Mass. He had been under hospice care for congestive heart failure. Born in Detroit in 1930, he earned a bachelor's degree from the University of Michigan in 1952, a master's in Harvard's China Area Program in 1955, and a Ph.D. in sociology from Columbia in 1962. In 1962 he was named to head the Survey Research Center at the University of California, Berkeley. In 1965 he accepted a position in Her Majesty's Colonial Service to establish a survey research center in Hong Kong where his major project was the Southeast Asian Family Life Study. Breaking with sociological tradition at the time, he studied individuals not as solo actors, but in the context of families. His team of field researchers provided a year's warning of the mainland's plans for major disruptions in Hong Kong at the onset of the Cultural Revolution, a warning that colonial authorities ignored. In the early 1970s, Mr. Mitchell taught and headed a survey research center at Florida State University and contributed to the Florida Task Force on Marriage and the Family. Midcareer, he joined the Foreign Service and was posted in Egypt, Yemen and Guinea Bissau. In Egypt, he played a leading role in the Neighborhood Urban Services Project. In Yemen, his Arabic skills allowed him access to broad sectors of society and earned him the nickname "The Sheik of Taiz." In retirement, he continued to be a prolific scholar and writer, with ten books to his name. He was preceded in death by his wife, Sylvia Ann Mitchell (née Sheppard, married in 1950, died in 1998). He is survived by his three children, Anthony, Maude and Adam; daughter-in-law Gwen Ossenfort; and grandchildren Tucker and Tate. He is to be interred in his mother's family cemetery in Midland County, Mich.