

MEMORIAL RESOLUTION

ROBERT ECKLES SWAIN (1875 – 1961)

Son of a pioneer family, Robert Eckles Swain was born on January 5, 1875 in Hollister, California, a town which his father and three associates planned and founded. He was raised on a ranch where he acquired his life-long hobbies of fishing and hunting and love of the outdoor life.

After two years of high school, he decided that he wanted a college education and entered Stanford University as a special student in its fourth class of under-graduates in 1894, making up the entrance requirements by independent study. There he was led into the profession of chemistry by Professor J. M. Stillman, then Head of the Department of Chemistry.

Professor Swain's first service to the University was as a teaching assistant in 1898 before he received the Bachelor's degree in 1899. From then until the time of his death, there is hardly an activity of the University in which he did not take a prominent part. After his appointment as instructor in 1899, he received a scholarship at Yale and during a leave of absence studied biochemistry under Mendel and Chittenden. He received the Master's degree from Yale in 1901 and spent the following year working with Hofmeister at Strassburg and with Kossel at Heidelberg, returning to Stanford as an assistant professor in 1902. A second year's leave of absence enabled him to complete work at Yale for the Ph.D. degree, which he received in 1904. He rose to the rank of full professor in 1912 and succeeded Professor Stillman as head of the department in 1917, a post which he held until his retirement in 1940.

As a student Professor Swain worked summers as a gold assayer, an activity which probably led him into his investigations of the constituents of smelter smoke and his life-long interest in the problems of atmospheric pollution, a field in which he was a pioneer and to which he applied his training as an analytical chemist and as a biochemist. He was a special agent for the U.S. Department of Justice in its smelter smoke investigations of 1909-1911, and an Expert Chemist with the Referee Board of Consulting Scientific Experts of the U.S. Department of Agriculture in 1910-1912. During 1920-1921 he served as Commissioner to the United States Federal Court in connection with the litigation over smelter smoke in the Salt Lake Valley, and during 1937-1938 as scientific adviser to the International Tribunal established by the governments of the United States and Canada to settle the Trail Smelter Case. The increasing concern with atmospheric pollution in the Bay Area and in Los Angeles as well as in large cities and industrial centers throughout the world naturally led various boards and committees to seek the benefit of his experience, and since acquiring emeritus status Professor Swain continued to be actively engaged in this field. Since 1957, he served as a member of the hearing board of the Bay Area Pollution Control District.

Besides these essentially research interests, Professor Swain played an active role in the affairs of both domestic and foreign scientific societies. He was a delegate of the American Chemical Society to the Eighth Congress of Industrial Chemistry at Strassburg in 1928, and a member of the National Committee on the Teaching of Chemistry in 1934-1935, of the Committee on Professional Status of Chemists in 1935-1936, and of the Committee on

Professional Training of Chemists, 1936-1941, of which he was chairman from 1939 to 1941. He was a Director of the American Chemical Society from 1937 to 1946 and Chairman of the Committee on Biochemical Nomenclature of the National Research Council from 1936 to 1941. He was a member of the United States delegation to the meetings of the International Union of Pure and Applied Science at Cambridge, England, 1923, The Hague, 1928, Madrid, 1934, Lucerne, 1936, and Rome, 1938, and of the International Committee on Biochemical Nomenclature in 1934. Recently he was named chairman of a new International Committee on Air Pollution, and at the time of his death was in the midst of organizing the membership and program of this committee.

Nor were Professor Swain's activities limited to scientific affairs. He was a member of the Palo Alto City Council from 1912 to 1921 and served three terms as Mayor of Palo Alto. In 1931 he became Chairman of the Board of Overseers of the California College in China and was President of its Board of Trustees from 1933 to 1946. He was a Trustee of the Institute of Forest Genetics at Placerville, California, and a member of the Citizens Committee on Reorganization of the Federal Government since 1949, of the National Council of the National Economic League, and of the Board of Governors of the Commonwealth Club of San Francisco.

These national and international duties did not interfere with his service to the University. He did his full share of teaching and ran the Department of Chemistry with a firm, guiding hand. He has been a member of an untold number of committees including the Advisory Board and the committees to establish the Lower Division, to establish the Independent Study Plan, and to build Memorial Auditorium. During 1929-1933 he was Acting President of the University while Dr. Wilbur served as Secretary of the Interior under President Hoover. Immediately on becoming Professor Emeritus he was made Chairman of the year-long Fiftieth Anniversary Celebration of Stanford University. He was a member of the Board of Directors of the Hoover Library (since 1938), and the driving force in the establishment of the Stanford Research Institute.

Numerous honors were bestowed on Professor Swain including that of Chandler Medalist from Columbia University in 1923, the LL.D. from the College of the Pacific in 1929, Chevalier of the Legion of Honor by France in 1933, the Frank A. Chambers Award by the Air Pollution Control Association in 1959, and Honorary Vice President of the China Council. He was to have been awarded Stanford's highest honor, that of Honorary Fellow, at the graduation exercises this month. This award will be made posthumously.

It is characteristic of the man that he had planned to attend meetings in Europe this summer on air pollution and that the stay in Europe was to be limited because he had work to do at home. He is survived by his widow, Juanita Jaffe Swain; by two children, Robert Cuthbertson Swain of Riverside, Connecticut, and Dorothy Muriel Begien (Mrs. Ralph N., Jr.) of Richmond, Virginia; by a sister, Mrs. Geneva Borden of Walnut Creek, California; and by six grandchildren.

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