

MEMORIAL RESOLUTION  
ERNEST C. ARBUCKLE  
1912-1986

On January 17, 1986, Ernest C. Arbuckle and his wife Katherine, known to thousands in the Stanford community, were killed in an automobile accident. Arbuckle served Stanford University in many ways over the preceding fifty years, especially as Dean of the Graduate School of Business from 1958 to 1968 and, on two occasions, as a member of the Board of Trustees. These words do not begin to suggest the extraordinary effect this man had on students, professors, administrators, and alumni—indeed, on just about everyone who knew him. Rarely does anyone other than a great teacher or a great scholar have the far-reaching effects on a university that Arbuckle had on Stanford. That impact is most evident in his success at building and leading the Stanford Business School to prominence. His other contributions and accomplishments were no less valuable.

For all but the first seventeen of his seventy-three years, Stanford was a major part of Arbuckle's life: as an undergraduate, as a graduate student, as a dedicated alumnus, twice as a trustee, ten years as a dean, and always as an active, contributing friend to others in the University. From another perspective, Ernie was an active part of the University's history for more than half of its first century.

Last year, a distinguished visitor offered a description of how Stanford has been able over its hundred years, and especially in the last fifty, to reach its present position of academic eminence. A sense of vision and mission, an ability to inspire others in that vision, a sense of daring, and a commitment to excellence were all cited as being ingredients of the University's success. These same features come uncannily close to capturing both the essence of Ernest Arbuckle's character and the mystery of how he accomplished so much as he took on one challenge after another, both here and elsewhere.

Ernie, as he was known to everyone, always was able to develop, invariably jointly with others, a vision of how the circumstances at hand—University, Board of Trustees, the business school, a department or program, SRI—could be moved to higher and more relevant levels of performance and service. He was able to inspire others to commit themselves. Around Ernie people seemed to have higher aspirations and achieve more. His own sincerity, his sense of practicality, and his deep humanity helped others overcome their own uncertainties. This in part explains how he was able to change what was essentially a small, regional business school into one of national and international prominence and leadership. He demonstrated the same qualities when, at President Sterling's urging, he became head of SRI to manage its separation from the University and its establishment as an independent, viable institution.

There was about this man also a sense of boldness, both in his personal career and in his University service. In 1936, his new Stanford MBA in hand, he delayed beginning a job, precious in those Depression years, in order to travel around the world with a classmate. Years later he left a successful and rewarding executive position with W. R. Grace Co. in order to become dean of our business school. It's hard to know which was greater, the risk or the personal sacrifice. Ten years later, again declining to stay and enjoy the satisfaction of success, he moved on to a new challenge as chairman of Wells Fargo Bank.

Although he was invariably optimistic about new circumstances, he was realistically so. He had a good sense for the core of a situation. He believed that people were usually of good will and that thus they could join together, overcome their parochial interests, and move—successfully—toward their common objective. He lived for what he believed, and often that involved community service.

Ernest Arbuckle also shared that "deep commitment to excellence" sometimes attributed to Stanford as a whole. Did a young University inculcate this into a young Arbuckle? No doubt, in part. But whatever its source, the mature Arbuckle gave back to Stanford his own "irresistible impulse" toward excellence, and the University and those who inhabited it during those years have been major beneficiaries.

John Gardner, a classmate and life-long friend of Ernie's, wrote about Arbuckle: "He was one of the most naturally gifted leaders I have ever met. His achievement in getting the business school on the path to greatness still stands as a model of leadership at its best." Arbuckle's task was to understand the unfolding revolution in American business education and then to implement the best of it at Stanford. His performance under these circumstances was extraordinary as he demonstrated the ability to identify the crucial elements in making the big decisions.

So much can be said in explanation of the profound impact this man has had on so many aspects of Stanford. He had energy. He had the ability to learn from experience and the capacity then to apply what he had learned. He was an integral part of his accomplishments, embracing them in an unpretentious way. He always wanted to give back to the University some of what he felt it had given him. Pervading all this was his deep sense of the worth and potential of individual human beings; he was convinced that each of us could accomplish more and, in doing so, could make a larger, public contribution. He often saw his challenge as helping people realize their own potentials. Above all, he was a leader, one whose life and contributions were inextricably tied to Stanford.

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Ernest C. Arbuckle was born on September 5, 1912, in Lee, New Hampshire. His family moved to California when he was a child and Arbuckle went to Santa Monica High School. At Stanford (AB, 1933, History), he participated in a wide variety of campus activities, all the while supporting himself financially. After a year in the Law School, he moved to the Business School where he earned his MBA in 1936. Arbuckle served in the US Navy during World War II, reaching the rank of Lt. Commander and earning the Silver Star (and Purple Heart) while commanding a motor torpedo boat squadron off Italy.

Arbuckle's business career was centered in San Francisco, at the Standard Oil Company before the war and at the Golden State and W. R. Grace Companies afterwards. After ten fruitful years as dean of the Stanford Graduate School of Business, he felt the School's biggest goals were well on the way to achievement and he should move on to something new and different; it was time for "repotting" to use a modest phrase which had great influence on his life.

He chose the banking business as a different challenge to face. Another ten years as Chairman of the Wells Fargo Bank brought him to another usual time for retirement—but for Ernie time for another challenge, another replotting, this time as Chairman of Saga Corporation.

Arbuckle held numerous business, community, foundation, and other directorships and trusteeships. He also served on local and national public commissions, including presidential ones. Arbuckle received two honorary doctorates. A professorship, the Ernest Arbuckle Professorship in Business Strategy and Policy, was established in his name at Stanford in 1982. His colleagues in the Business School established two additional special awards in his honor.

Through all these activities, Ernie was supported by his wife, Kitty (nee Katherine Norris Hall), who was killed in the accident with him. Their friends have emphasized repeatedly the role that Kitty played in Ernie's accomplishments. She participated actively in student and faculty affairs. President Wallace Sterling paid special tribute to her, saying: "Kitty made her time, her energy, and her home so available to Stanford's best interests, that the University can never adequately thank her."

Kitty and Ernie are survived by four children: Ernest C. Arbuckle, Jr., Etna, Calif.; Joan Buenrostro, San Antonio, Texas; Katherine Pribble, Klamath Falls, Oregon; and Susan Arbuckle, Stanford, Calif. They are also survived by a legion of friends.

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