

MEMORIAL RESOLUTION
WILLIAM C. BARK
(1909-1996)

William Carroll Bark, former director of the History of Western Civilization Program, Professor Emeritus of medieval history at Stanford University, and Senior Fellow Emeritus at the Hoover Institution, died October 11, 1996, in Palo Alto. He was 87. His major work, *Origins of the Medieval World*, published by Stanford University Press in 1958, became a standard text. It defended the proposition that the early Middle Ages were an era of innovation, discovery, and technical advance. Bark argued that the Middle Ages, rather than being a “dark age” after the fall of Rome, opened a path to “eventual freedom and individualism and dignity” enjoyed, in that era, only by a small ruling elite.

A native of Tacoma, Washington, Bark earned his bachelor’s degree at Stanford under the eminent medievalist Edward M. Hume, and then his doctorate at Cornell University. He taught Western Civilization at Stanford from 1936 to 1940, and then went on to Lawrence College in Appleton, Wisconsin, and the University of Chicago before returning to Stanford in 1947. He directed the History of Western Civilization Program until 1960. He also taught courses in medieval history and wrote extensively on the medieval era.

A freshman course in the History of Western Civilization (HWC) was introduced at Stanford in 1935 under the History Department’s Chairman, Edgar Eugene Robinson. A committee of Professors Thomas Bailey, Carl Brand, David Harris, Harold Fisher and Max Savelle organized the three quarter course and drew up a detailed syllabus. Max Savelle was appointed director of staff, a position he held until 1944. He was succeeded, in 1947, by Bark who, as result of his earlier service, was familiar with and sympathetic to the course. Bark served as director for the next 13 years. During his tenure university enrollments greatly increased, the staff doubled in number, and HWC became the most popular course at Stanford. The general structure of the course remained unchanged, and its content was altered only slightly. Bark did, however, appoint more ancient history specialists and Europeanists.

George H. Knoles, Margaret Byrne Professor of American History, emeritus, summed up Bark's period as director in *The Stanford Historian* (no. 6, April 1980) in the following words:

Bark succeeded in regularizing certain practices involving the staff, improving its morale. In earlier years considerable vagueness attended recruitment and re-appointment of instructors. The Department had always wanted to staff the course with persons who had completed the Ph.D. degree, as it had also hoped to attract young scholars from a variety of graduate schools. Uncertainty of length of appointment, low salaries, and pressure to care for the Department's own Ph.D. candidates made it difficult to fulfill History's wishes. Prevailing University and Department policy permitted only one-year appointments for instructors. Bark gained approval for a *modus vivendi* whereby informal promises could be made for appointments up to [three] years provided an instructor's performance merited retention; ambiguity was further reduced by making it clear during recruitment that promotion from the rank of instructor could not be expected at Stanford. Moreover, Bark succeeded in improving salaries, as well as getting approval to reward excellence through salary differentials. Partly as a result of Stanford's increasing prestige during the postwar decades, the staff became more varied and included some of the abler young people coming from the country's better graduate schools; the character and quality of the staff continued high during the remaining nine years of HWC's existence as a required course."

During the troubled 60s, after Bark's retirement, HWC came under attack and the support of students and the administration declined. In 1969 the course was radically changed and reduced in size, and by 1971 it was no longer a university-wide requirement, nor an offering of the Department of History. It was not until 1980 that the Senate of the Academic Council reinstated a western culture requirement for undergraduates.

During its 34 years HWC was acclaimed by the 40,000 students and over 220 young scholars who served their apprenticeships as instructors in "Civ." It was widely praised as Stanford's most valuable introduction to a liberal education. When graduating seniors were asked which Stanford course had been of greatest importance, they overwhelmingly responded that HWC was "the best course I ever had at Stanford." William Bark, as director for 13 years, played a major role in achieving that acclaim.

Bark and the Chairman of the History Department selected the Western Civ. instructors who were limited to three year appointments. About one-half were Stanford's best doctoral candidates; the rest were recruited from universities across the country. Savelle and Bark chose well, for a number of instructors in Western Civ stayed on at Stanford as administrators or as teachers of history: Harold Bradley, Charles Barker, Peter Duignan, George Knoles, Merrill Spalding, Rixford Snyder, Wayne Vucinich, etc. Many "Civ" instructors made important scholarly contributions in history and administration and one, J. F. Wallace Sterling, returned to become President of Stanford University (1949-1968).

Bill, as he was fondly called, loved the out-of-doors, gardening, swimming--he was seen most days of his life at Stanford on his bike, going to the History Corner or to the "gym" and the swimming pool. A quiet man, he had a wry sense of humor. Members of the History Department raised chickens in the back of Bill's garden off Escondido Road. After a hard freeze one winter night, many of the chickens died. Bill reported the loss to his swimming pool mates. He said, "George (Knoles), Wayne (Vucinich) and Rix (Snyder), your chickens died last night." They all were shocked, and Knoles said, "Bill, how do you know they were our chickens?" Bark just smiled.

In 1960, Bark co-chaired a committee appointed by the San Francisco Board of Education to report on the school system, and he also served on the Carnegie Committee on Educational Inquiry. Bark joined the Hoover Institution in 1966 as a Fellow, supported by a grant from David Packard, to do research on the growth of liberty and freedom in Western society since the time of the Greeks. He worked continuously on this topic for the rest of his life.

He is survived by his wife, Eleanor Carlton Bark, sons Dennis Bark, a senior fellow at the Hoover Institution, and Jared Bark of Warwick, New York, and two grandchildren.

Committee:
Peter Duignan, Chair
Lewis Spitz
Wayne Vucinich