

MEMORIAL RESOLUTION

EDWARD MCNEIL FARMER (1901 – 1969)

Edward McNeil Farmer died August 20, 1969 after suffering a heart attack at his Palo Alto home. Born in Los Angeles, Professor Farmer came to Stanford as an art student in 1919, graduated Phi Beta Kappa in 1923, and became a member of the teaching staff the following year. He remained on the faculty for forty years. During this period he played a vital role in developing the Art Department, serving as head between 1932 and 1946. He held the Art Department together almost single-handedly during the depression years, and it was under his leadership at that time that the department was rejuvenated and commenced its subsequent growth. Professor Farmer also taught at Stanford in Germany (1958) and Stanford in Italy (1962). He retired in 1964.

A member of a pioneer Stanford family, both Professor Farmer's father and mother graduated from Stanford before 1900. His aunt, Chloe Lesley Starks, and his uncle, Everett Parker Lesley, also graduated from Stanford before 1900 and later joined the faculty. Chloe Lesley Starks served as an Associate Professor of Graphic Art and Everett P. Lesley as a Professor of Mechanical Engineering. Mabel McKibben Farmer, his wife until her death in 1956, was a Stanford graduate and an artist of distinction. His widow, Arbie Stewart Farmer, who graduated Phi Beta Kappa, received her degree in Botany from Stanford. His brother and sisters as well as his three sons all attended Stanford, and the impact of this family has done much to shape the character of Stanford University.

Professor Farmer was primarily a painter, though in his early years he created wood engravings and lithographs of great distinction. At Stanford he studied with Professor Starks, and later, at the Art Students League of New York he studied with George Bridgeman, Dmitri Romanofsky, and Jan Matulka. Though his watercolors from the late thirties and early forties revealed him to be a virtuoso performer in that medium, he later specialized in oils. His subject matter included still lifes, flower studies, and portraits, but he is probably best known for his landscapes which were painted at Inverness, Hawaii, and in the environs of Stanford. His widely shown works have been exhibited in New York, Chicago, San Francisco, Los Angeles, and the Midpeninsula. Upon his retirement he was honored with a major retrospective exhibition at the Stanford Art Gallery, and since then he has had one-man shows in Southern California and Michigan.

A statement by a colleague prepared for his retrospective exhibition in 1964 provides an insight into Professor Farmer's unique point of view. "His forty years at Stanford have left a corps of deeply devoted students and friends who met him first as a teacher and then came to know him as an artist and a dedicated man. Always indifferent to current modes, his most distinctive attributes are his complete honesty and his devotion to his particular vision of beauty." His own words quoted from a letter best describe this particular vision of beauty: "My paintings reflect innumerable facets of childhood experience; the enthralling magic of the

realistic stage scenery of fifty years ago, the book illustrations of Howard Pyle, Maxfield Parrish, Arthur Rackham, and N. C. Wyeth, the poetic lyricism of the Art Nouveau style, and the romantic idealism of the Craftsman period." Later in the same letter he defined his aims more sharply. "I crave everything lovely and have searched for beauty and tried to produce it all my life -but it has to be real, not an illusion and not to be found in an escape from reality nor in a denial of reality ... The longer I work the more certain I am that beauty and experienced reality are not contradictory, and by reality I mean the evidence of my own senses concerning the physical world in which I live."

Though Professor Farmer was primarily a painter he was also deeply interested in the history of architecture and in interior design and he initiated courses in those fields at Stanford. These courses were distinguished both by their sensitive presentation of historical materials and by Professor Farmer's sharp wit and lively humor. Indefatigable as an advisor, his untiring and sympathetic counseling is remembered by generations of students. He was also active in art organizations, serving as president of the Western College Arts Association, the College Art Administrators Association, and the Pacific Section of the Society of Architectural Historians. Two Stanford University Press publications, "Forty Five Contemporary Mexican Artists" and "Art of the Northwest Indians" were edited by him.

Professor Farmer is survived by his widow, Arbie. He also leaves three sons, Andrew of Los Altos Hills, an electronics salesman, Mark of New York, an advertising man, Edward (Ted), a professor of Chinese history at the University of Minnesota, and a step-daughter, Mrs. Michael Lesh of Rochester, New York. Also surviving are twelve grandchildren. To them we of the Academic Council extend our deepest sympathy.

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