

MEMORIAL RESOLUTION

GORDON FLOYD FERRIS (1893 – 1958)

Gordon Floyd Ferris, who died on May 21, 1958, had been associated with Stanford University continuously for forty-six years, and would have retired as Emeritus Professor of Biology (Entomology) at the end of the current academic year. The significant aspects of his early life were set forth in a brief sketch he prepared before his death, and the following paragraphs are quoted from his biographical summary.

"Born January 2, 1893, at Bayard, Allen County, Kansas, a "tank town!" where his father was a "gandy dancer" on the railway. He was the fifth child and the fourth boy in a family of five. When he was between two and three years old the family moved to a forty acre farm near Monticello, Cedar County, Missouri, where they lived in a one-room log cabin. When he was a little more than three years old his mother died after giving birth to another son, who also died while still young.

"...He and his sister went to live with his paternal grandmother and an unmarried uncle on a farm near La Harpe, Allen County, Kansas. At the age of about ten years the grandmother died . . . His father thereupon moved to La Harpe with the two brothers who had remained with him, obtained employment as a day laborer in a zinc smelter, and . . . established a "bachelor" home in La Harpe with the two brothers.

"Gordon remained with his father until he was thirteen, except for two summers spent as a hired hand on a farm near Lola, Kansas. In the meantime his oldest brother, Leslie, . . . had enrolled at Ottawa University, a small Baptist college at Ottawa, Kansas, where he acted as the local circulation agent for the Kansas City Star. When Gordon graduated from the eighth grade at La Harpe, at the thirteen, Leslie had him come to live with him. With the support of Leslie and such money as Gordon could make by carrying papers. . . he remained at Ottawa until 1909, having in the meantime graduated from the "academy" of Ottawa University . . . Leslie graduated from the college in 1909 and secured a position as a teacher in the high school at Telluride, Colorado. He left Gordon as circulation agent for the Kansas City Star in Ottawa and Gordon entered Ottawa University as a freshman in the fall of 1909. He was a complete failure at this, withdrew from the college, and proposed joining the Navy as so-on as he became seventeen.

"It was necessary to obtain the consent of his father to join the Navy. The papers were sent to his father, who refused to sign them without consulting Leslie. Leslie refused to give his consent and instead secured a place for Gordon with the Telluride Power Company at Telluride.

". . . In its early days the Telluride Power Company had trouble securing trained men, and under the leadership of L. L. Nunn, its founder, had established the practice of employing young men at reduced salary and after a time sending them to college. Out of this grew the Telluride Association, an endowed institution, entirely apart from the power company. . . In the spring of

1911 Gordon was transferred to the station of a power company at Olmstead, Utah, where the Telluride Association ran a school for its members.

"The Telluride Association maintained a house at Cornell University, where most of its men who were selected for "Preferment" went. Gordon disapproved of the social emphasis at this house and asked instead to be sent to Stanford University. He had seen Kellogg's "American insects" while he was at Ottawa and Kellogg - then a professor at Stanford - was the only entomologist he had ever heard of. In the summer of 1912 he was granted \$450 by the Telluride Association and came to Stanford. With the continued support of the Association - never amounting to over \$500 a year - he finished his work for the degree of M.A. in 1917.

"He was then appointed a teaching assistant in entomology at Stanford and further data will be a matter of record." That record includes the publication of approximately 200 papers and books dealing with the classification, ecology, and morphology of insects; forty-two years service as a teacher and research scientist in capacities ranging from Teaching Assistant to a full Professor in the field of entomology; a year spent doing field work in Mexico under a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1925-26; another year at the Molteno Institute in England during 1930-31; field and laboratory work in China as a Fulbright Fellow in 1948-49; active membership in several scientific organizations; attainment to an outstanding international reputation as an entomologist; high esteem among his colleagues and his students as a superlatively able teacher; and election to honorary membership in several learned societies.

Among his more important publications were his "Contributions toward a Monograph of the Sucking Lice", which appeared in eight parts between 1920 and 1935; seven volumes of his "Atlas of the Scale Insects of North America" and a series of eleven papers on "Contributions to the Knowledge of the Coccoidea (Homoptera)." He founded and edited the journal "Microentomology," which cited many of his own papers and those of his students, and saw it into the 23rd volume. Almost every one of his papers was illustrated with his own superb line drawings. He required careful work and concise writing from his graduate students, but recognized the impossibility of holding them to the same level of excellence in draftsmanship he set for himself.

He offered course work in the philosophical aspects of entomology and for years drew classes numbering upward of seventy in a course on the relationship between insects and man, a course that became known on the campus as "Bugs and Bites." To this class came many university undergraduate students who had no professional interest whatever in biology.

It would be a mistake to imply that Gordon Ferris confined his attention and his efforts to his entomological studies and to his teaching. He was a man with wide interests, one who participated in the life and problems of his community to a degree rarely attained by one so busy. He was active in the local Sea Scout program for many years, served in the California State Guard and in the U. S. Coast Guard during World War II, regularly contributed to the blood bank as long as doctors would permit and complained vigorously when, to protect his own health, they refused to let him continue as a donor. He had a warm affection for people - particularly for those who were in this country as strangers and for the struggling students in whom he saw reflected some of the problems he had faced as a boy and young man. He befriended hundreds, and with the full cooperation of his devoted wife, took many of them into his home for varying lengths of time when they were in sad need of financial support and human understanding.

Gordon Ferris was a forthright man. One always knew where he stood on a controversial subject. Yet he was tolerant of the views of those with whom he disagreed violently. He could, and did, argue vehemently about politics, philosophy, religion, and many other subjects without holding the slightest rancor against the person whose views he opposed. On the other hand, he was totally intolerant of moral or intellectual dishonesty. He was, in many ways, a man of contradictions; he often spoke bluntly and brusquely, yet was most tender-hearted in his dealings with his fellow men. His Sea Scouts jumped at his gruff commands, but beamed with pleasure for they knew his "bark was far worse than his bite."

He was widely read, and an interesting and stimulating conversationalist; a man who loved life and good living, a marvelous host. He was known and highly respected by scores of tradesmen and professional people in Palo Alto and the University community. He lived a full, unusually productive life, and had he survived, he would have continued, on retirement, to contribute substantially to the intellectual and social life of the city and the University where he lived for nearly half a century. Being denied that privilege, he has left behind him glowing memories and deep friendships. All who knew him, students, colleagues, townsmen, will miss and mourn him. They Join with his wife, daughter, son-in-law, and four grandchildren in saluting the memory of a man of uncommon stature.

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