

## MEMORIAL RESOLUTION

### FELIX MAXWELL KEESING (1902 – 1961)

Felix Keesing died in full stride on April 22, 1961. With his death Stanford University lost a most able, loyal, and respected member of its faculty.

Fee Keesing was a many-faceted man. He drew pictures and designs for his own books. He represented his country on international commissions. During his career as an administrator he built two departments of anthropology. As a scholar he blazed new trails in anthropology.

Born in Taiping, British Malaya on January 5, 1902, he received his A.B. in 1924, his A.M. in 1925, and the Litt.D. in 1934 from the University of New Zealand. By the time he received the doctorate his career was already fully launched. He made his first visit to the United States at the age of nineteen on an art scholarship. It was while sketching life in the poorer districts of Chicago that he decided he was really most interested in what made people behave as they did. After returning to New Zealand he began to study the discrimination of colors, lines, and shapes by Maori children. He soon decided that he did not know enough about their social and cultural background, on which he then focused his work. Out of this came his master's thesis and his first book, The Changing Maori, published in 1928 when he was twenty-six. After his marriage in 1928 to Marie Margaret Martin, he went to Yale and then to the University of Chicago with a Rockefeller Foundation Fellowship. During this period he studied under several of the first generation of American anthropologists, particularly Clark Wissler, whose influence later bore fruit in Fee Keesing's classic ethnohistoric treatment, Three Centuries of Contact and Culture Change Among the Menomini Indians of Wisconsin, published in 1939.

Another significant strand of his career began to form with his appointment in 1930 as director of an international research project on Dependencies and Native Peoples of the Pacific for the Institute of Pacific Relations. This appointment took him to American Samoa and eventually to Shanghai and Peking, where he wrote the book Modern Samoa, and to the Philippines. This latter trip resulted in Taming Philippine Headhunters (a title he regretted and ascribed to the publisher) and later, The Philippines--A Nation in the Making. During 1933-34 he went to the London School of Economics as a Rockefeller Foundation Fellow, where he studied with the great functionalist, Bronislaw Malinowski. The first of two sons, Donald Beaumont Keesing, was born in London in 1933.

The Keesings departed from London for Honolulu in the fall of 1934. Their second son, Roger Martin Keesing, was born there in 1935. In three years Fee Keesing began to build his first department as Chairman of the Department of Anthropology and Sociology at the University of Hawaii. Despite the demands of this task, he organized in 1936 a five-week study conference of sixty-six educators and social scientists drawn from twenty-seven national and racial groups on the common problems of education and cultural adjustment among peoples living within the Pacific Ocean area. Education in Pacific Countries, the result of this conference, anticipates much of what is now being consolidated in overseas technical assistance programs in education.

In 1942 the Office of Strategic Services called him to Washington, D.C. where he worked with South Pacific materials and lectured to high ranking naval officers on the cultures of the area.

Fee Keesing came to Stanford University as a participant in the Far Eastern aspect of the Army Specialized Training Program, under the then School of Humanities in 1943. In 1946 he became Associate Director of the Stanford School of Naval Administration, where he trained personnel going into places in the Pacific which the Japanese had left, and did an extensive survey of former mandated Japanese islands, including Guam, Saipan, Truk, Ponape, the Palaus, and the Marshalls. He became Executive Head of the combined Department of Sociology and Anthropology at Stanford in 1948. After the rapid development of these two disciplines, they separated, and in 1956 Fee Keesing became the Executive Head of the Department of Anthropology.

While at Stanford University, although building a new department of anthropology for the second time in his career, he entered his most productive period of scholarly writing, and carried out two highly significant missions for the government of the United States. The first of these was as a Technical Consultant to the UN Mission to Western Samoa, a historic first trusteeship commission. The second was his service as Senior Commissioner for the United States, a direct appointment by the President, on the South Pacific Commission, a six-nation body dealing with the welfare and development of territories in the South Pacific area. In this capacity his skill at applying anthropology to the solution of human problems was most apparent. He organized and encouraged efforts to deal with every conceivable exigency from relations between Samoan chieftains and western government officials to coconut blights.

Fee Keesing's scholarly production while at Stanford was great in quantity and high in quality. The two major streams of development in his professional career -- that of applied anthropology and that of systematic analysis of culture change processes -- are clearly apparent. The first may be observed in Native Peoples of the Pacific World, Science of Man in the World Crisis, Handbook of the Trust Territories of the Pacific Islands, and Social Anthropology in Polynesia. The latter interest is apparent in Culture Change, Elite Communication in Samoa and a large number of articles.

Fee Keesing never liked to separate scholarship from practical application, and he believed in the creativity of man. His last major publication, a highly innovative textbook, titled Cultural Anthropology: The Science of Custom, demonstrates most exactly not only those characteristics of his approach, but also the very unusual breadth of his interests and experience, and his devotion to teaching. The book is a masterpiece in pedagogy as well as a soundly integrative overview of anthropology.

In all of his work he was aided by Marie Keesing, who was his collaborator on some of his books and his companion on his most adventurous trips to remote peoples in the hinterlands of the Pacific.

He was nearing completion of a significant piece of work, an ethnohistorical analysis of the processes of culture change among the lowland and mountain peoples of Northern Luzon, when he died. Characteristically, he wrote in the early mornings before departmental demands

began, and rushed home to write some more when the daily administrative problems were solved and he had completed his tasks as a full-time teaching professor.

We will remember Fee Keesing as a man whose work was never completed, but whose completed work opened significant leads in more than one dimension of human affairs.

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