

MEMORIAL RESOLUTION

ROBERT RICHARDSON SEARS (1908 – 1989)

Robert Richardson Sears, David Starr Jordan Professor of Psychology Emeritus at Stanford University, died at his home in Menlo Park on May 22, 1989. Born in Palo Alto on August 31, 1908, he was eighty at the time of his death. He became Professor of Psychology and Chair of the Department of Psychology in 1953, Dean of the School of Humanities and Sciences, 1961-1970, and was the organizer and first head of the Boys' Town Center for Youth Development, now known as the Center for the Study of Children, Youth and Families. During a period of failing health, he continued with professional writing whenever his health permitted.

He is survived by his wife, Pauline Snedden (Pat) Sears, an emeritus professor of education, following 57 years of married life, and two grown children, David O. Sears and Nancy Sears Barker, plus six grandchildren.

Bob's roots were deep in Stanford, where his father, Jesse B. Sears, graduated in 1909, immediately joined the faculty of the School of Education, and served continuously until retirement.

The heritage on both sides was English. The Sears family had settled in Massachusetts in 1623 and the Richardsons in North Carolina in the mid-eighteenth century. Descendants of both families moved westward, but only Bob's parents made it all the way to the Pacific Coast.

Bob and his future wife met as Stanford students. She also had a Stanford connection by way of her father, David S. Snedden, who had also been a Stanford faculty member at Stanford in the early 1900's. Bob graduated in 1929, and went on for graduate study in psychology at Yale University, where she later joined him. They were married in 1932, just after he received his Ph.D. and was about to take up his position as an instructor in psychology at the University of Illinois.

In 1936 they returned to Yale, where Pat completed her Ph.D. Bob moved up through the ranks to Associate Professor of Psychology there, when, in 1942, he received the attractive (and somewhat unexpected) invitation from the University of Iowa to become a Professor of Child Psychology and Director of its Child Welfare Research Station. The offer was unusual in that, up to that time, Sears was not identified with child development.

He remained at Iowa until 1949, and in a sense "the job had made the man." By that time he was a leader in developmental psychology. Harvard invited him to an important professorship to continue work in this area.

After four years at Harvard, he accepted the invitation to return to head the Department of Psychology at Stanford because of his early ties there. Pat was appointed as a faculty member of the School of Education.

There is much to be said about his accomplishments at the various stages of his career. His Ph.D. dissertation at Yale followed the completion of various investigations in experimental psychology. It treated a problem in physiological psychology -the role of the optic lobes in the formulation of conditioned responses to visual stimuli in goldfish. Although the study was successful, it convinced him that he did not wish to follow this field as a career.

At Illinois, he became interested in the psychology of personality -- after finding himself giving a course on personality for which he felt badly prepared. He became the leading figure in the effort to bring psychoanalytic concepts into the mainstream of psychology by subjecting them to the rigors of operational definition and empirical test. While at Yale he had taken an important share in a multi-author book on Frustration and Aggression (1939), giving experimental tests of psychoanalytic concept, followed by his Illinois research and culminating in the important monograph A Survey of Objective Studies of Psychoanalytic Concepts (1943). These books had great influence on the next generation of scholars.

At the Iowa Child Welfare Station he began to focus on children, in particular on stable differences among children in the personality patterns they acquired. He believed that the root of these differences could be found in the family, specifically in the kinds of socialization pressures families applied. Sears was among the first to do detailed empirical studies connecting children's characteristics to child-rearing practices. He carried on these studies with increasing depth and sophistication at Iowa in the early 140's, at Harvard in the early 150's, at Stanford after his move here in 1953. The two books Patterns of Child Rearing, (1957) and Identification and Child Rearing (1965), along with numerous papers in professional journals, reported landmark studies that established the arena of discourse in socialization for many years. In these studies he strove to maintain the kind of controls required by good experimental work without sacrificing the ecological validity of real-life interactions between parents and children. He was the first to devise laboratory analogues of family interaction by having the children's own parents carry out standardized socialization procedures in a laboratory setting.

His influence on the field of child psychology went beyond the leadership in theorizing and the methodological development. He was also exceptionally effective in establishing research centers and institutions that would provide the framework for groups of students and colleagues. After leaving the Iowa research station he established the Laboratory of Human Development at Harvard; after his move West, he established a Laboratory of Human Development at Stanford. He took the lead at Stanford in founding the Bing Nursery School as a model preschool and research facility. Later in his career he took responsibility, as earlier noted, in the Boys' Town Center.

His national leadership included the presidency of the American Psychological Association in 1951 and, in 1973-75, the presidency of the Society for Research in Child Development. He also edited the monograph series of this society, 1971-1975. He was a Trustee of the Center for the Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences, 1953-1975, and a Fellow, 1968-1969. He filled many assignments within the National Research Council and the Social Science Research Council.

His honors included membership in the American Philosophical Society and the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. In 1975 the American Psychological Association honored him with the Distinguished Scientific contribution Award, and, in 1980, the American

Psychological Foundation gave the Gold Medal Award for lifetime contributions to psychology to him and Pat jointly -the first couple to receive the award jointly.

Sears' contributions within Stanford as an administrator and leader were notable. In 1961 President Wallace Sterling, and his provost, Fred Terman, needed a new Dean for the School of Humanities and Sciences. They convinced Bob to take the job and they chose well. Bob was already established as a fine teacher, one of the country's most distinguished developmental psychologists, and an administrator who, as Executive Head of the Psychology Department, had made a very good department into a truly great one. It is not so clear that they realized that they had also chosen a person with strong interests in the humanities and especially the arts.

Bob's first two Associate Dean appointments were Virgil Whitaker, a Shakespearean, and Halsey Royden, a mathematician with strong interest in the classics. Bob managed a small and well-organized Dean's office. As Arnice Streit, the keeper of all department budgets in those days has said, "Those were the golden years -- oh how we worked!" Bob was artful at delegating and in the process training a cadre of outstanding academic administrators. After Whitaker and Royden, there followed Richard Lyman, Lawrence Ryan, and Lincoln Moses.

As Dean, Bob was a curmudgeon. He was not one to spend money lightly. However, his salient characteristic was high standards. He had a concept of excellence that included a strong sense of quality of mind and he stuck to that standard.

He and Virgil Whitaker spent many hours planning and instituting the Stanford Summer Festivals which did such things as import chamber orchestras from Europe. All this created a congenial atmosphere for the performing arts in a university whose reputation lay largely in science and technology. He took pride in recruiting and supporting Lorenz Eitner, long-term Chairman of the Art Department. The Cummings Art Building was constructed during his administration and the Museum was reconstructed. Bob's major disappointment was the inability to raise the money for the construction of a new theater.

Bob was outspoken in his disdain for the bureaucratization of procedures, yet he took over from his predecessor, Dean Philip Rhineland, the idea of creating a committee of senior faculty that would serve as advisory to the Dean on all appointments or promotions to tenure. Bob made the committee a strong instrument of faculty quality control.

Along with his decanal responsibilities Bob continued to teach a seminar on Mark Twain. He had a life-long interest in him, and published two scholarly articles on him. One dealt with Twain's attachment to his mother and the other with a more methodological exploration of content analysis to date some of the change in Twain's writings.

During the last three decades of his life Bob was deeply involved in follow-up studies of the group of intellectually gifted that had been begun by Lewis Terman in 1922. He had taken on the responsibility following Terman's death in 1956, and succeeded in extending the study to the full life span. A national planning committee that he convened saw a unique opportunity to investigate ripe maturity, because the earlier records could illuminate development in the later years. In all, five surveys of these cooperative subjects were carried out between 1960 and 1986. To improve the archive Sears had directed a systematic recording that captured large amounts of previously unexamined material so that it could be examined by a computer. The resulting file,

which follows 700 persons over 60 years, and about 80 more for much of the period, is the first such archive in the history of psychology. Investigators from several disciplines are using it in their research today.

The long chain of research reports by Terman, Robert Sears, Pauline Sears, and others will be capped by the volume on which Bob was concentrating during his last years, in collaboration with Carole Holohan. This book, to be entitled The Gifted in Later Maturity, traces the life satisfactions and regrets of the group, their marital histories, and their adaptations to advancing age. Particular attention is given to the way in which opportunities of women in their generation were constrained.

Bob was throughout a great friend and a great professional colleague. He was a top-notch teacher, investigator, and administrator. He was also fun to be with, whether playing ragtime on the piano, playing bridge, or expressing himself strongly on whatever matter was under discussion. Those who knew him will never forget him.

Ernest R. Hilgard, Chair
Lee J. Cronbach
Albert H. Hastorf
Eleanor E. Maccoby