

## MEMORIAL RESOLUTION

### LEON E. SELTZER (1918 – 1988)

Leon E. Seltzer, director emeritus of the Stanford University Press, died January 11, 1988, at the age of 69. He served as director of the Stanford University Press from 1956 to 1983. Under his hand, the press developed into one of the outstanding university presses in the nation. He was known throughout the Stanford community and the world of publishing for his probity, his practical intelligence, his farsightedness, and his rigorous adherence to the highest standards.

Leon Seltzer was born in Auburn, Maine, in 1918, and carried with him throughout his life the twists of phrase and accent of Maine. He received his A.B. degree from Columbia University in 1940. His chief occupations during college, besides amassing a formidable range of knowledge, were fencing and the Columbia University Press. He won a national fencing competition as a foilsman. He derived his student aid as a member of the staff of the Columbia Encyclopedia. He was pursuing a graduate degree in English when he was drafted into the United States Army.

Although not an engineer by education, he was selected for officer training in the Corps of Engineers and ultimately achieved the rank of major. His most important contribution to the Corps of Engineers was a technique for teaching soldiers to read maps. Subsequently The New Yorker published his humorous, self-deprecating account of an occasion in which soldiers under his command, on a target-practice expedition in the mountains east of Mt. Rainier, were hopelessly lost in the fogs.

After the war, Leon Seltzer rejoined the staff of Columbia University Press. He became an editor of the Columbia Encyclopedia and later the editor of the Columbia-Lippincott Gazetteer of the World. He was then made sales manager of the Press. In 1948, he married Lenore Chafetz, then an assistant professor of Psychology at Vassar College.

In his spare time, he turned his hand to writing. The New Yorker published his light verse and some short pieces on place-names and geographic oddities. Under the pseudonym Eugene Leigh -- the initials a reversal of his own two first initials -- he published stories in a magazine generally read under the hair dryer. The proceeds went to the purchase of the Seltzer's first refrigerator and washing machine. That was enough of potboiling. He did not wish to exercise this skill any more.

In 1956, Leon Seltzer was appointed Director of the Stanford University Press. At that time, the Press was both a publishing house with a small and largely provincial list and a complete printing plant on uncertain financial footing. Leon Seltzer set himself two tasks: to make the Press a self-sustaining operation and to publish only excellent books. Although his prior experience had primarily been in editing and sales, his great practical intelligence allowed him to master quickly the bindery, typesetting operation, and the printing shop, as well as the financial affairs of the Press. He was able to turn the operation around and put, and keep, the Press on a sound financial basis.

Perhaps even more important, he improved the quality and increased the number of books published by the Press. His goal was to publish not best sellers, but books that would, as he said, "add a dimension to man's understanding of himself." He gathered a talented group of editors so that he could promise authors not only efficient publishing but also excellent editing. Stanford Press soon became known for its painstaking, intelligent treatment of all books bearing its imprimatur. It was able to attract eminent American and foreign scholars. By the time of Leon's retirement in 1983, the Press had developed an international reputation. Its backlist numbers over 900 and it now publishes some sixty books a year.

Leon Seltzer became an important figure in the publishing world. Because of his unwavering standards and his keen analytical ability, the members of the Association of American University Presses looked to him for leadership. As one former press director put it, "He had the disturbing habit of being right." In 1963-64, the AAUP sent him to visit scholarly publishers throughout Asia to increase cooperation. In 1968, he was elected president of the AAUP. Through the years, Leon Seltzer was wooed by a number of outstanding university presses as well as trade publishing houses. His answer was always, "Not interested." Rather than advancement of career, he stood for institutional loyalty.

Leon Seltzer was an active member of the Stanford Community. He headed several particularly important task forces and committees.

In the summer of 1969, he directed the Summer Festival of the Arts. In the early seventies, he chaired the Budget Adjustment Program, whose charge was to reduce the operating budget by five million dollars. In the middle seventies, he chaired a committee investigating the relations among the various libraries. He participated in committees on the recruitment of more women faculty; the status of Stanford police; the University's investment responsibilities.

As Director of the Press, Leon Seltzer often had legal problems to consider, and he became fascinated by the law. This fascination quickened as the Stanford Press began to concentrate on law as one of its specialties. He entered the Stanford Law School in 1971, graduated in 1974, and became a member of the bar that summer -- all the while continuing with his duties at the Press.

In 1975, he won a Guggenheim fellowship to study "copyright law and the economics of book publishing." Typically, he turned this to good account by writing what is still considered one of the seminal works in copyright law: Exemption and Fair Use in Copyright. This work was first published in two issues of the Bulletin of the Copyright Society in 1977 and in book form by Harvard University Press in 1978. When he retired from the Press, he practiced law, specializing in copyright, publishing contracts, and related matters. He was counsel at the San Francisco firm of Majestic, Gallagher, Parsons, and Siebert. He was never too busy, or so professional, that he could not give a colleague a word or two of free legal advice on some matter of copyright or contract.

The Seltzers' was a happy home, and despite the fact that both Leon and Lenore were deeply involved in their professional work and their growing family, they generously shared their home with others. Their house could be called an intellectual salon where scholars from Stanford, Berkeley and the Center for Advanced Study in Behavioral Sciences were brought

together to dine and to argue. Though the conversation was always crackling and sometimes disputatious, the interchange forged many friendships, collaborations, new ideas, books, and good times.

Although a true intellectual, fascinated by ideas in which he had no personal stake or even professional interest, Leon Seltzer was much more than that. He was at home in the tool shed as well as in the library. At the Seltzer summer place on Waldron in the San Juan Islands off the coast of Seattle, he was fisherman, carpenter, and plumber and kept ten motors operating, including that of the boat in which he confidently navigated the waters of the islands. He served on the Los Altos Elementary School District Board of Trustees and the Santa Clara Board of Education. He continued to play tennis until early in 1987. He loved chess. He liked to watch football. He cared about politics and was a man of commitment and compassion.

Leon is survived by Lenore, their three daughters and six grandchildren. His daughters, Leon would have said, were the great achievements of his life. Deborah (Mrs. Brian) Griffin practices law in Boston. Janet Seltzer (Mrs. James Prickett) practices medicine with Kaiser Permanente. Marcia (Mrs. David) Goldstein manages the Emporium-Capwell in South San Jose. He was proud of his doctor, lawyer, merchant chief.

It would be difficult to overestimate what Leon Seltzer did for the Stanford Press and consequently for Stanford. To perpetuate his connections with the Press, funds are being gathered to establish the Leon E. Seltzer Memorial Fund. This endowed publication fund will honor especially fine books published by the Stanford University Press.

Though Leon Seltzer's death leaves a vacancy nothing will fill, we rejoice in a life lived honorably and well.

Nancy H. Packer, Chair  
Byron D. Sher  
Bernard Siegel