

MEMORIAL RESOLUTION
GEORGE FRANK SENSABAUGH

(1906-2002)

Professor Emeritus George Frank Sensabaugh died in Stanford University Hospital on February 19, 2002, at the age of 95. He is survived by his wife Elizabeth and their two sons, both of whom earned Ph.D.s and, like their father, became academics. George, Jr., is a professor at the University of California, Berkeley, and David is senior curator of Asian art at Yale University. From 1935 until his retirement in 1971, Professor Sensabaugh taught a variety of courses in sixteenth and seventeenth-century English literature at Stanford, advised numerous doctoral candidates, and directed many dissertations on Renaissance subjects.

Born in Dublin, Texas, on July 15, 1906, he lived in San Diego and Oklahoma before enrolling at Vanderbilt University. His graduate studies were at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, where he received his M.A. in 1930 and his Ph.D. in 1934. His dissertation on the seventeenth-century dramatist John Ford later became his first published book, The Tragic Muse of John Ford (Stanford, 1944).

After he finished his dissertation in 1934, Stanford and North Carolina Universities worked out a mutually beneficial exchange of instructors, Sensabaugh and William Wells, in part to obviate what was perceived to be a tendency to "inbreeding" in both departments--an inclination to hire their own graduates. George arrived at Stanford at the beginning of the 1935-36 academic year to carry a teaching load of eight sections of Freshman English and one course in literature over the three quarters--a standard beginning instructor's assignment that remained the same until well into the 1950s. In 1947, George became a full professor while doing research for his second book, That Grand Whig, Milton (Stanford 1952). In 1964, Princeton University Press brought out his Milton in Early America, which, like its predecessors was immediately recognized as a major contribution to seventeenth-century scholarship and remains essential reading for anyone interested in Milton's literary and political influence. William Riley Parker, the dean of American Miltonists, wrote of it: "Professor Sensabaugh's exploration has out across the moral, intellectual, and spiritual life of early America. As a canvass of Milton's varied and pervasive influence during that period of our national history, it is safe to say that the book will never be superseded."

Professor Sensabaugh's reputation as a Renaissance scholar brought offers of professorships at several other universities, as well as the graduate deanship at his alma mater, Vanderbilt. Contented, however, to remain at Stanford, he turned all of these down, though he did accept visiting positions at Berkeley, Texas, Southern Methodist, Claremont, and the California Institute of Technology.

In addition to his scholarly achievements and his teaching responsibilities, George served the Department of English, the university, and the profession in a number of other capacities. Several times he was acting executive head of the English department and, during one academic year, he chaired both the department and Special Programs in Humanities, where for many years

he was a member of the committee in charge of the Undergraduate Honors Program. He was active in several scholarly organizations and was elected president of both the Philological Association of the Pacific Coast and the Milton Society of America.

His experience as a teacher of composition led to the publication, with his departmental colleague Virgil Whitaker, of Purposeful Prose (Henry Holt, 1951) and to chairmanship in the 1940s of a State Commission on English in California Public Schools, an assignment that led to several articles and to his editorship of The Study of English in California Schools (Stanford, 1952).

For a number of years after they were married, the Sensabaughs lived on College Terrace in Palo Alto before their move in 1953 to Byron Street. There they became famous for their gracious Texas hospitality, especially to newcomers arriving to join the English department. It was often said that George made the best mint julep north of the Mason-Dixon line.

After his retirement, George continued to be, as he had been for decades, a familiar figure walking to and from campus almost daily. Where before his destination had been either the library or his departmental office, he now headed usually for his Green Library study. A long-time member of the Associates of the Stanford Libraries, he continued to use its collections for research and lecturing material. For from 1976 until 1983, he served as one of the original faculty members of the Fromm Institute for Lifelong Learning, an organization at the University of San Francisco in which professors emeriti from several universities lecture in a variety of academic fields to retired men and women. While there, George offered courses on drama, Shakespeare, Dante, and, naturally, Milton, before finally retiring from more than a half-century of research and teaching. His death has deprived the scholarly community of a wise and generous colleague who for many years provided a gracious model of all that is best about our profession.

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