

MEMORIAL RESOLUTION

JOHN PLUMMER STEWARD, JR.

(1927 - 2000)

Dr. John Plummer Steward, Jr., died at his home in Palo Alto on February 5, 2000, of biliary cancer. He was an Emeritus Professor (Teaching) in the Department of Microbiology and Immunology. His major activity over a quarter of a century was in the Office of Student Affairs in the School of Medicine.

Born in Huntington Park, California, in 1927, John was a member of the eleventh generation of the Steward family in the United States, the first Steward having arrived in New England two years after the Mayflower immigrants. Initially the Stewards lived in Massachusetts and Maine. Recent generations settled in California, and John grew up in San Diego. In his retirement years, John prepared a privately-published memoir about the Stewards, working from family papers then in his hands.

He enrolled at Stanford as a freshman in 1944, at age 16, and after graduating in Biological Sciences he spent two years in dental school before entering Stanford Medical School in 1950. The M.D. degree was awarded after he completed his internship at the U.S. Naval Hospital in Oakland. He spent a year at the U.S. Naval School of Aviation Medicine in Pensacola, Florida, then was on active duty as a flight surgeon in the Far East, with responsibility for the crew of the aircraft carrier USS Kearsarge. He remained in the U.S. Naval Reserve for years, rising to the rank of commander.

Dr. Steward returned to Stanford for graduate work in Medical Microbiology, completing many formal requirements for the Ph.D. degree before discontinuing graduate study to become an Instructor in the Basic Medical Sciences in 1960, shortly after the School of Medicine moved from San Francisco to the Palo Alto campus.

By 1964, John was Assistant Professor of Experimental Medicine, Assistant Director of the Fleischmann Laboratories, and Assistant Dean for Student Affairs. He rose to become Director of the Fleischmann Labs, an interdisciplinary teaching facility in an era when bench work was routine in the initial years of medical education. He became a Senior Lecturer in Medical Microbiology in 1970, and then Professor (Teaching) in Microbiology and Immunology. He hit his stride in 1971 when promoted to Associate Dean of Student Affairs, the post he held until retiring from the University in 1990.

John's academic activity centered on advising, supervising, teaching, and administration, not on research. During and after his postdoctoral year with Sidney Raffel he collaborated with another faculty member, R. J. Roantree, in a series of studies of immunization, in guinea pigs and mice. Their joint papers appeared in the 1960's and were concerned with the ability of intestinal bacteria to cause disease as related to their genetic makeup and responses to antibiotics and immune factors of the host animal. In the same era, he was a Visiting Lecturer in Immunology in the School of Public Health at U. C. Berkeley, and in 1968 while on sabbatical leave John was a Visiting Scientist at the Hall Institute of Medical Research in Melbourne, Australia.

John led the Office of Student Affairs, serving the School and her medical students, under a succession of seven deans and acting deans. This office administers scholarships as well as arranging class meetings, scheduling clinical clerkships, maintaining grade records, etc. John recruited and sustained a cadre of high-quality staff members devoted to carrying out these exacting tasks. They appreciated the hard work of their leader, and his unflinching good cheer and optimism. His own responsibilities centered on advising individual students, especially in their initial years. John was proud that students graduated from our medical school with financial debts no larger than those incurred by med students at schools with much lower tuition charges. His considerable talents in fund raising were devoted to augmenting scholarship moneys.

Along with others, including Robert Glaser, Bernard Nelson, and Roy Maffly, John worked to implement the School's commitment to admitting and educating students from disadvantaged minority backgrounds. Shortly after the faculty voted in 1968 on a commitment to this, Stanford was catapulted into a position of national leadership among American medical schools for these efforts. With sensitivity and generosity, John strongly supported the faculty decision. He worked on academic advising for Stanford undergraduate students heading for medical education here or elsewhere. He obtained funding for research by medical students, thereby increasing their orientation to academic medicine.

His day-to-day work in counseling brought John into contact with students who were ill or otherwise impaired, and he collaborated with Cowell Student Health in responding to their needs. Later he was active in developing standards and procedures for dealing with impaired physicians, here and elsewhere.

John served in leadership roles in the American Association of Medical Colleges, and in the consortium of thirteen private medical schools with goals and interests similar to Stanford's. A colleague at another medical school described him as "a tireless worker who is inordinately dedicated" to his work.

He twice received Stanford's Kaiser Award for Outstanding and Innovative Contributions to Medical Education. He was selected to be the speaker at the medical school's commencement in June 1989.

Stanford's curriculum for med students is unusual in its flexibility. While many faculty members are committed to maintaining this for successive generations of students, John was the one who was in a position to implement flexibility, and he did so with enthusiasm. With our small student body of just 86 students per entering class, each student may tailor-make his or her own class schedule, freeing time to pursue other academic interests. John encouraged med students to enroll in courses outside the School, and was proud to keep track of the high number who did. John encouraged students to exercise their options, though of course it would have been simpler administratively if they had marched in lockstep as do the "boys in white" described in a sociologist's research about medical students elsewhere.

The national accrediting body was somewhat unfamiliar with the complexities accompanying this flexibility, incurred when a medical student sought a graduate degree along with the M.D., devoted attention to her young child, or strove to maintain a program of laboratory research while fulfilling clinical obligations. Renewing accreditation was an ordeal for the School until John took on the assignment of preparing the necessary extensive background materials. Working with Bob Cutler and Alberta Siegel, he succeeded in educating the accrediting site visitors over each of three successive seven-year periods. Rough sledding was converted to smooth sailing by John's patience and skill.

John strove to be dean to all Stanford medical students. He sidestepped the many controversies that engage the School's faculty. Therefore his accomplishments were not as visible as those of faculty members who were outspoken in their convictions. At the retirement party for John, some faculty members were surprised at the presence of guests from afar who are star faculty members and administrators elsewhere. They had returned to pay tribute to the dean who had launched them on their distinguished careers. John was enthusiastic in supporting students heading for careers of research

and teaching and also students aiming for primary care or for a clinical specialty. He is remembered with gratitude by students who include an astronaut, the principal writer for the TV show "ER," a path breaking transplant surgeon, and many other physicians.

Dr. Steward served on the Board of Directors of the Faculty Club for several years, and was its President in 1981-1982.

After retiring from Stanford, John contributed to medical efforts to deal with the AIDS epidemic, volunteering as a clinician with patients at the Santa Clara Valley Medical Center. He also chaired the HIV Disease Commission for the Episcopal Diocese of California, headquartered in San Francisco, with various programs ministering to the religious and spiritual lives of AIDS patients.

John's love of music was reflected in his pleasure in playing the piano, though only for his own enjoyment. It was reflected as well in his devotion to opera, in New York and Bayreuth as well as San Francisco. In retirement, he served on the Board of the Music Guild. When Board members learned of his illness, they joined with some of John's other friends in endowing a scholarship in his name, to pay for private music lessons for a Stanford undergraduate student headed to medical school. John believed that medical students and physicians benefit from an avocation in the arts. Before he died he met the initial recipient of this scholarship, who studies piano with John's friend, faculty pianist Fred Weldy.

Dr. Steward's fascination with natural history was displayed in his habit of keeping careful daily weather records. His detailed log of Palo Alto's weather extended his father's long record of similar data. In his retirement years, John installed an electronic weather station at his home. His extensive collections of Audubon prints, of butterfly specimens, and of hand-carved wooden ducks also reflected his interest in natural history. Before his death he gave his collection of duck decoys in the West Coast flyway to the Oakland Museum.

Dean Eugene Bauer gave a reception in John's honor in November 1999. Various colleagues spoke informally. He was not able to attend, so their remarks were videotaped for him. It was announced that a classroom in the medical school complex will bear John's name. One former student recalled dispatching a report to the dean's office that he was hospitalized. Five minutes later Dr. Steward was at his bedside. The student presumed that he'd need to file a lot of forms, but John assured him that none

was needed and instead they should concentrate on maintaining a flow of information to the student's family.

George Steward, his grandfather, died in Idaho in 1923. The obituary described him as “naturally quiet and averse to anything approaching ostentation or personal display.” We endorse the same description for his grandson John.

A liturgy in celebration of John Steward's life was held at his church, St. Mark's Episcopal, in Palo Alto on February 12. Reflections were offered by Dr. Daniel Cooper, Cowell staff physician and a long-time advisee and friend of John's. Dan and his wife Carolyn, pediatric nurse at Packard Hospital, cared for John in his final illness, enabling him to remain at home, as he preferred. Dr. Bruce Reitz of the School of Medicine and his wife Nan of the Stanford Help Center joined the Coopers in providing this service to John, who had been best man at their wedding. John's ashes reside in the memorial garden at St. Mark's.

John Steward epitomized all that is good about Stanford. We count ourselves fortunate to have been among his many colleagues and friends.

Presented to the Senate of the Academic Council June 8, 2000

Alberta E. Siegel, Chair

Robert W. P. Cutler

Roy H. Maffly

Sidney Raffel