

MEMORIAL RESOLUTION

BAILEY WILLIS (d. 1949)

Bailey Willis died March 19, 1949, after an exceptionally full life which marked him as more than an eminent geologist. Seldom has the University had a more loyal friend, and seldom has the campus community had a more public-spirited resident, generous and always ready to give wise and kindly counsel. Yet we must share his friendship and achievements with the world at large, for Bailey Willis traveled, worked, and won recognition on almost every continent.

The innumerable cheerful legends concerning our friend have centered about some of his picturesque characteristics, but have not fully reflected his greatness. His 91 active years, his famous white beard, his physical feats, and his knowledge of the popular subject of earthquakes have captured public attention, but were not the significant parts of his life and character. His colleagues and the world of science respected him for deeper reasons.

A keen mind was a prime component of the truly great Bailey Willis. This largely determined his other qualities. Dr. Willis was remarkably perceptive and observant, and he reasoned quickly and constantly. His scientific work emphasized interpretation and explanation. Although he was a master of orthodox structural geology, he was not content to be simply a storehouse for existing knowledge. His initiative and ingenuity impelled him toward novel hypotheses which sometimes aroused argument as well as admiration. Bailey Willis enjoyed both the approving and disapproving responses to his proposals. He welcomed criticism and discussion, and defended his ideas with amazing finesse. One of his greatest scientific contributions of a general nature was the stimulus that resulted from some of his more controversial theories.

A wide variety of talents and interests was possessed by Dr. Willis. More than once his lectures ended with the audience standing up en masse and applauding, so outstanding was his ability as a speaker. He excelled as a writer of books and articles. He knew birds, flowers, art, and literature as well as geology. He was proficient in drawing, water-color painting, and in manual skills such as cabinet-making.

The personality of this extraordinary man was one of his engaging assets. People were delighted by his words and manner, his humor and lack of ostentation. He made a strong impression upon his students, and he left them with a feeling of warmth and friendliness.

Dr. Willis' character is well described by one of his former field assistants, J. R. Pemberton: "His character was such that all who came into contact with him were benefited and absorbed much from him. - - - Those who have been his companions amid the jungles of the tropics, the deserts of America, the forests of the northwest, the

barrens of Asia, the Andes and Rockies, and the thorn bush of Africa can testify how tough was his fiber in hardship and how fine and spiritual was his character at all times."

Bailey Willis recently wrote: "I have lived 90 odd years, traveled in all the continents, and have met a great diversity of people. I find one fundamental feature of faith which they all hold -- It is the Golden Rule." Certainly the author of this passage exemplified the code to which he paid tribute.

Dr. Willis was educated in Germany and at Columbia University. He made geological studies for many private companies and institutions, and for governments and public agencies. He was at one time Chief Geologist of the United States Geological Survey. He served as president of many professional societies and was a member of a large number of scientific organizations in this country and abroad. He received honors both in America and overseas. He was the recipient of the highest geological award in the United States. He wrote six books and monographs, and more than 130 articles. Bailey Willis came to Stanford in 1915, as Professor of Geology and head of the Geology Department. He became emeritus in 1922, but remained here to the time of his death. Stanford was indeed fortunate to share such a large part of his career.

The Academic Council of Stanford University here records its appreciation of Bailey Willis as an able and respected colleague and as a beloved member of the Stanford community. Be it resolved, therefore, that this memorial be entered in the minutes of this Council and that copies be sent to the surviving members of his family: Mrs. Hope Willis Rathbun, Cornelius Grinnell Willis, Robin Willis, and Mrs. Margaret Willis Smith.

Ben M. Page
Siemon W. Muller
Lydik S. Jacobsen