

MEKORIAL RESOLUTION

WILLIAM A. SPURR (1905 – 1975)

Bill Spurr did many things during his life, and did them well. He was an aviator, astronomer, and explorer; he served in business, the military, government, and academe; he was a consultant, an author of distinction, and a leader in professional societies. But, he is best remembered as a warm and sensitive person with high standards of honor and personal integrity and a delightful sense of humor. He had a keen sense of fairness in his dealings with other people. He had a certain reserve, resulting from unwillingness to thrust himself upon others. He was loyal to his friends and devoted to his students.

William Alfred Spurr was born in Washington, D.C. on December 24, 1905. His father, Josiah Edward Spurr, was a noted geologist and explorer. He was raised in New Rochelle, N.Y., attended Harvard where he studied mathematics and astronomy, and was graduated magna cum laude in 1925. In that same year he earned an ensign's commission as a naval aviator and was a member of the Harvard Expedition to Sumatra to observe a solar eclipse. He then returned to Harvard, this time to attend the Business School, and received an MBA in 1928. Subsequently, he was a member of the U.S. Geological Survey Expedition of 1928 that explored the Mount Spurr region of Alaska (named after his father). After seven years in the business world as analyst and statistician, he enrolled at Columbia University to study the measurement of economic fluctuations under Wesley C. Mitchell and Frederic Mills. His research was concerned with cyclic and seasonal fluctuations in Japan, and he was awarded a Ph.D. in 1940 based upon this work. In the meantime, he had begun teaching at the University of Nebraska in 1937 as Assistant and later Associate Professor of Statistics and Director of Business Research. He left this position in 1941 to serve as economist with the U.S. Department of Commerce and the War Production Board. In 1942 he returned to active duty with the U.S. Navy. After the war, he joined the faculty of The University of Chicago, and in 1946 came to Stanford as Professor of Business Statistics.

During his twenty-five years in the Graduate School of Business, Bill served the community and the profession in many ways. He was at various times chairman of the School's Ph.D., research and other committees, President of the Stanford AAUP, and President of the San Francisco region of the American Statistical Association. He continued his research on practical methods for measuring seasonal variation, trends and correlation and on methods for constructing index numbers. His projections of economic growth and population for California and other western states were widely used by State and Federal agencies and have proven remarkably accurate. For example, he warned in the mid'1960's that "the great industrial development that lies ahead, while it will make a few Californians richer, also threatens to blight the esthetic living values for the great majority of Californians." He participated in the Rampart Dam Survey in Alaska in 1965. But perhaps his most important contribution was to a generation of Business School students, who will recall Professor Spurr removing coat and tie and rolling up his sleeves at the beginning of each lecture, and then proceeding to make the subject of statistics both intelligible and interesting. As the late Dean Hugh Jackson used to say, "Bill Spurr

is the only man in the country who has students begging to take a course in statistics." His text in Business Statistics has continued among the leading books in the field for two decades. Bill showed the same sense of fairness and duty towards his students as towards his friends.

After his retirement in 1971, Bill traveled, continued to write, and enjoyed his favorite outdoor activities of swimming, hiking, and biking.

He died on March 8, 1975 in Hawaii.

His survivors include a daughter Diana, by his first wife Elizabeth, and four children by his second wife Hallie. The children are Roberta, Patricia, Edward, and John. Also, two brothers survive: Steven Spurr, professor and former president of the University of Texas at Austin, and John Spurr of New Hampshire. To all these we extend our sympathy.

Charles P. Bonini
Herbert E. Dougall
Thomas W. Harrell
Arthur Kroeger