In Memoriam

George A. Knox
1918-1999
Department of English

George Knox was born May 19, 1918 in Everett, Washington, and raised in Portland, Oregon, where he worked for his father, a florist, before attending Pacific University, where he majored in Biology. At Reed College, he took his B.A. in Literature (1943), at which time he enlisted in U.S.N.R., serving with the Amphibious Forces of the U.S. Pacific Fleet until the close of 1945. After completing an M.A. in English at the University of Oregon (1949), he entered the graduate program at the University of Washington, where he completed his Ph.D. in 1953. By that time, he had married. Doctorate in hand, he moved, with his wife, Elizabeth, and their three children, to the new campus of the University of California, at the foot of the Box Springs Mountains, in Riverside. Professor George Knox was one of the founding faculty members of UCR in 1954, which explains why a street just North of the Chancellor’s residence is named after him.

From the outset, Professor Knox fit well into the rapidly changing campus. Strong in both research and teaching, he moved through the ranks from Instructor to Associate Professor in 1961, and then to Full Professor in 1966. He served a successful term as Chair of the Department of English, hiring many of the people who went on to establish a solid Ph.D. program, with strength in all nine of the traditional historical fields. He found time, also, to serve as Fulbright Lecturer at the University of Vienna (1957-58) and Erlangen-Nürnberg (1964-65). Again, in 1974-75, he spent the academic year as Guest Professor at the University of Trier. After his retirement in 1984, he pursued his interest in exotic gardening, as a member of the American Bonsai Society, and as an active poet, writing and publishing in the demanding form of haiku, renga, and tanka. A volume of Professor Knox’s poetry in this vein, Tendrils of the Eye, splendidly illustrated by Edward R. Perez, was published by Haiku Moments Press in 1993.

It is hard in a few paragraphs to summarize the achievement of George Knox through his many decades of service to the University, this partly because the range of his intellectual interests was so wide: fiction, poetry, drama, photography, American Literature, the Harlem Renaissance, Seventeenth Century English Literature, and critical theory. He wrote books and articles on Kenneth Burke, John Dos Passos, Walt Whitman, Sadakichi Hartmann, Dante, Donne, Herbert, Melville, Hawthorne, Eliot, Twain, Faulkner, Pound, and James. Professor Knox read papers all over the world on these and other topics, general and particular. And throughout a successful career as a scholar, he consistently served the University community at the highest level in teaching and service.

Professor Knox established a solid reputation first with Critical Moments: Kenneth Burke’s Critiques and Categories (1957). Not long afterward came his very impressive Dos Passos and “The Revolting Playwrights” (1964), which Professor Knox co-authored with Herbert Stahl. During the Fifties and Sixties, Professor Knox published dozens of articles in such respected journals as New England Quarterly, Western Humanities Review, Renascence, American Quarterly, and ELH.

In one area—the study of Sadakichi Hartmann—George Knox literally invented the field. Before interdisciplinary studies became the mantra of upwardly-mobile deans, George Knox, often in collaboration with Harry Lawton, inquired into the poetry, criticism, prose, cinematic career, and photography of Sadakichi Hartmann. His achievement in this field amounts to no less than five highly-regarded books published during the 70’s by top-flight publishers, to very favorable public reception.
Perhaps the most notable of these is *The Valiant Knights of Daguerre*, a book which did much to advance the serious study of photography, and of Sadakichi Hartmann in particular. Published in 1978 by the University of California Press, this book received wide notice in, among other periodicals, *Village Voice, New York Times Book Review, The New Republic,* and *American Photographer*. The *Canadian American Journal* claimed it to be “one of those books that the serious student of the subject just has to have,” readers for the press pronounced the work “unique, timely,” “comprehensive,” “very important,” “invaluable,” “marvelous.” All in all, George Knox authored or co-authored nine books of high quality, and over fifty essays.

As a teacher, George Knox was indefatigable in his efforts to help students. “Professor Knox,” one wrote, “is a fine teacher, and a very sensitive one.” In the days when we solicited remarks only from English majors who had graduated, students uniformly described him as a friend, who treated them as future literary critics. “He is,” one wrote, “a great professor, with a wealth of knowledge. He is creative, and sensitive to students’ opinions, and make[s] the students work to explore new forms and styles in literature.” Above all, he was “[k]ind and considerate . . . He cared about the total student. I wish,” said one student, “I could have taken more than two classes from him.” Another wrote, “I remember this man as very personable and interested very much in the individual student.” Surely this is how all of us want our students to remember us.

S. N. Stewart  
F. M. Carney  
H. Lawton,  
M. Miller  
H. H. Schmidt