

# Francis Edward Mineka

*July 26, 1907 — October 4, 1985*

Francis Mineka was born in Caneadea, New York, and received his secondary education at Binghamton Central High School. So much of his life was intimately tied to the heart of New York State that even those close to him tend to forget that he knew the Library of the British Museum about as well as he knew Olin Library and that his affiliations with educational institutions were diverse. In the 1930s and early 1940s he did graduate work at Columbia University (receiving his Ph.D. degree in 1943), where he at times also taught Latin, and in 1933-34 he was an instructor of English and Latin at St. Francis College in Brooklyn. He taught in summer sessions at the College of the City of New York, the University of Delaware, the University of Minnesota, and the University of Illinois, and he was an assistant professor of English at the University of Texas from 1943 to 1946. In 1968 he gave the Alexander Lectures at the University of Toronto.

Fran's lifelong love affair with Hamilton College started in 1925, when he enrolled as a freshman. In his undergraduate years he was awarded a number of prizes for his skill in debate and writing, edited the literary magazine, and won his Phi Beta Kappa key. On graduation in 1929 he was appointed an instructor in English composition. He taught for three years in that capacity, meanwhile earning his M. A. degree in 1931. He rejoined the Hamilton faculty in 1934 as an instructor in English and public speaking and served as an assistant professor from 1935 through 1941. He helped to establish the Hamilton alumni magazine during those years, was awarded a Doctor of Letters degree in 1958, and was an alumni trustee of the college from 1963 to 1969. In 1934 Fran married Muriel McGregor, and Muriel has often said, jokingly but justly, "I didn't realize that when I married Fran I was also marrying Hamilton College."

Muriel might have said, with equal justness, that when she married Fran, she married Cornell. Fran was thirty-nine when, in 1946, he found the political dissension at the University of Texas so unbearable that he turned down the university's offer of tenure and took a three-year appointment as an assistant professor at Cornell. One year after his appointment he was promoted to associate professor, and a year later he was made chairman of the Department of English. In 1951 he became a professor of English and held that position until 1973. For eight years, from 1948 through 1957, he chaired the department, with a year of relief in 1952-53 to pursue his own scholarship under a grant from the Fund for the Advancement of Education. In 1956 he was made the first incumbent of the Class of 1916 Professorship.

He had enjoyed the amenities provided by the first professorial chair endowed by a graduating class for only a year when he accepted the deanship of the College of Arts and Sciences for a five-year term.

For half his active years at Cornell, then, Fran was engaged in two of the most arduous administrative positions in the university. His customary modesty and quiet determination, and his fairness and tolerance and foresight, made his years as chairman and dean memorable ones. When he took over the chairmanship, the department had lost a good deal of the distinction it had earned in the days of Joseph Quincy Adams, Lane Cooper, Martin Sampson, and William Strunk. By the time he left, he had helped reestablish it as one of the most distinguished departments of English in the world. During the Eisenhower-Kennedy years, when universities were expanding and competition amongst them was fierce, he managed somehow not only to maintain the strength of arts and sciences at Cornell but also to re-invigorate departments, particularly in foreign languages, that had languished. Nor did his skillful administrative work cease with his term as dean. From 1964 through 1968 Fran was a member of the University Library Board, and, in his last year on the board, he was responsible for a forward-looking report that has since guided library policy. Friends who are aware of his dedication to the library have established in his memory a fund that will be used to purchase books for the Hart Library, the noncirculating collection of standard texts in English literature housed in Olin Library.

After completing his work as dean, in 1962-63 Fran received concurrently a Guggenheim Fellowship and a Fulbright award. Late in 1963 his two-volume edition of *The Earlier Letters of John Stuart Mill: 1812-1848* was published by the University of Toronto Press. His preface contains Mill's words, "I found the fabric of my old and taught opinions giving way in many fresh places, and I never allowed it to fall to pieces but was incessantly occupied in weaving it anew," together with Fran's comment, "Mill was not engaged solely in reweaving the fabric of his opinions during these years, however; he was busily engaged in trying to influence the opinions of others." Those words characterize Fran, too, and his posture and his efforts not only as administrator but as teacher and scholar. His doctoral work in the literature and culture of the nineteenth century culminated in the publication of his book *The Dissidence of Dissent: The Monthly Repository, 1806-1838* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1944; republished in 1972). At Cornell he influenced generations of students in his undergraduate and graduate surveys of the Victorian era; in his popular course in Browning, Dickens, and Arnold; and in his freshman and sophomore courses in expository writing. His pedagogy extended far beyond Goldwin Smith Hall when he edited the Victorian section of *Masters of British Literature* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1958). In 1972, the year before he became professor emeritus, his decades of devotion to studies on Mill reached a climax with the publication,

in four volumes, of *The Later Letters of John Stuart Mill: 1849-1873*, edited in collaboration with a close friend of Hamilton College, Professor Dwight N. Lindley. That year, too, saw the end of twenty years of service on the board of editors of *Cornell Studies in English* but not the end of Fran's commitment to scholarly work. Retirement, for him, meant retirement to the library, where he had under way an edition of the most-interesting items of John Sterling's correspondence.

Fran's legacy to Hamilton and to Cornell is as monumental as his edition of Mill's letters. He took great pride, too, in another kind of legacy: his son, John (Cornell B. A. '58, Ph.D. '65), is a professor of mathematics at Lehmann College, and his daughter, Susan (Cornell B. A. '70), is a professor of psychology at the University of Texas.

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