

*At a meeting of the FACULTY OF ARTS AND SCIENCES on May 15, 2001, the following tribute to the life and service of the late Sterling Dow was spread upon the permanent records of the Faculty.*

## **STERLING DOW**

BORN: November 19, 1903

DIED: January 9, 1995

Sterling Dow was born on 19 November 1903 in Portland, Maine. His Dow ancestors had earlier been in Massachusetts, but as Tory loyalists had moved temporarily to Canada. He doubtless relished the memory of their staunch traditionalism. He himself regularly returned to the family residence near Kennebunkport.

Dow entered Harvard from Phillips Exeter Academy and was graduated in 1925 with honors in philosophy. He won the Fiske Scholarship for a year at Trinity College Cambridge, where he studied history. Returning to Harvard, he sought out the ancient historian, W.S. Ferguson, whose guidance and support determined his subsequent career. After he completed a master's degree in 1928, a Guggenheim Fellowship (the first of three he was to win) and various Harvard awards allowed him to live in Athens from 1931 to 1936, associated with the American School of Classical Studies. There he did archaeological field work and wrote a dissertation (Ph.D. 1936).

Dow and his wife, Elizabeth, arrived in Athens just as the American excavations were getting under way in the Agora, the ancient center of public life. The discoveries there, the scholars associated with them, and the American School were henceforth of central importance for his professional life and work. Of equal importance at the time was his collaboration with the great epigrapher, Johannes Kirchner. Inscriptions on stone provide crucial documentation for the study of Greek history. Dow personally developed a superior technique for making portable copies (called "squeezes") of inscriptions. Aided by his wife, who was his constant and loving partner until her death in 1990, he made an immense collection of both new and previously known texts. They provided a treasure house of material for his own research, and later for the dissertations of his students, on all aspects of Athenian public and private life and prosopography. Many subsequent trips enlarged this collection. In Athens he completed his first book, on the Athenian councillors, and he also brilliantly identified and reconstructed a kleroterion, the allotment machine used for filling public offices in the Athenian democracy.

Returning to Harvard as an Instructor in 1936, he remained on the faculty until his retirement in 1970, a member of both the Classics and the History Departments, and after 1949 the John E. Hudson Professor of Archaeology. He was long and actively associated with Eliot House. A wartime leave took him with the O.S.S. to Washington and to Egypt, where he made contacts that were useful later when he was a founder of the American Research Center in Egypt. Upon his return to Cambridge he served briefly as the University Archivist.

As a scholar Dow was known primarily for his contributions to Greek epigraphy and history, but his range was remarkable. He wrote five books and more than 150 articles and reviews. Many of his studies illuminated the political and social institutions of Athens and the men who were involved in them, but he also wrote important papers on the historical setting of the Homeric poems, on religious calendars, and on early writing and literacy. He gained international recognition for his deduction, on historical grounds, that the famous Linear B tablets of the second millennium B.C. were inscribed with an early form of Greek, a deduction confirmed when the tablets were finally deciphered in 1953. In all his wide-ranging scholarship he started from material evidence and always kept in view the practical realities and economic constraints of real life.

After the Second World War, foreseeing new pressures on the study of classics, especially in the secondary schools, he embarked on a whole new phase of activity with a series of imaginative enterprises to energize teaching and to popularize knowledge of the ancient world. He founded a successful new organization, Teachers of Classics in New England; he instigated a revised edition of a standard Greek reference grammar; he helped found a new journal, *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies*; he helped launch a new textbook for beginning Greek; and he was the founding father of *Archaeology* magazine. Meanwhile his scholarly productivity continued unabated.

After retirement from Harvard he taught for seven years as a Distinguished Professor at Boston College and then in 1978 as Blegen Distinguished Professor at Vassar. Earlier he served as president of the Archaeological Institute of America, of the American Classical League, and of the Classical Association of New England. He was Sather Professor at Berkeley, Annual Professor at the American School at Athens, and Walker-Ames Professor at the University of Washington. He was an Honorary Life Member of the Society for the Promotion of Hellenic Studies in London and of the Deutsches Archäologisches Institut in Berlin. He was awarded three honorary degrees.

Dow was a popular and effective teacher, attracting and stimulating students at all levels, from large lecture courses to small seminars, constantly suggesting new questions and approaches and making even undergraduates feel that they were partners in the exhilarating adventure of scholarly discovery. And to his graduate students he imparted his own confidence in the paramount importance and high worth of scholarly research. His unflinching

encouragement and enthusiasm gave them a sense of accomplishment and pride in their work which they repaid with deep loyalty.

In a life and career of remarkable achievement, Dow combined qualities not often joined in one person: he was an exact and prolific scholar, an innovative visionary and activist, a stimulating and devoted teacher, and a witty and eloquently laconic speaker and stylist. His manner of expression and his view of life were wholly guided by his New England Yankee principles and character. Above all he valued independence, sometimes to the dismay of his colleagues. He distrusted any consensus.

Dow could be said to have had three spiritual homes: the south coast of Maine, the American School at Athens, and Widener Library. During his lifetime he was seldom far from them, whether in body or in spirit. He died on 9 January 1995, lucid in mind and independent to the end.

At the time of his death he was survived by his daughter, two sisters, five grandchildren, and three great-grandchildren.

Respectfully submitted,

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Mason Hammond  
Emily D.T. Vermeule †  
Zeph Stewart, Chair