

*At a meeting of the FACULTY OF ARTS AND SCIENCES on March 13, 2007,  
the following tribute to the life and service of the late Mason Hammond  
was spread upon the permanent records of the Faculty.*

## MASON HAMMOND

BORN: February 14, 1903

DIED: October 13, 2002

Mason Hammond was born in Boston on February 14, 1903, the son of Samuel Hammond, Class of 1881, and Grace Learoyd, and died in Cambridge on October 13, 2002, four months short of his one hundredth birthday. Nearly all of his professional life was devoted to Harvard.

Prepared at St. Mark's School, to which he later rendered service including as chairman of the Board of Trustees, in 1921 he achieved the highest score of all those who sat for examinations for admission to the Harvard Class of 1925, and he achieved Rank List I for each of his undergraduate years. He was elected to Phi Beta Kappa in his junior year, graduated *summa cum laude*, and gave the Latin Oration at Commencement. From 1925 to 1928, he studied at Oxford University as a Rhodes scholar where, a member of Balliol College, he earned a second B.A., and a B.Litt.

In 1928, Mason Hammond returned to Harvard, where he began his career in the Classics and History departments. From 1937 to 1939, 1951 to 1952, and 1955 to 1957 he was in charge of classical studies at the American Academy in Rome, and he served two appointments as acting director of the Villa I Tatti, Harvard's Center for Italian Renaissance Studies. In 1950 he succeeded his mentor, Arthur Stanley Pease, as Pope Professor of the Latin Language and Literature, retiring in 1973, and in the year following he served as Visiting Professor of the Classics at the University of Wisconsin. Professor Hammond enjoyed a long and fruitful retirement, during which he devoted himself to the history of his College and University. He was awarded the Harvard Medal by the Harvard Alumni Association in 1987, and in 1994 the University conferred upon him the honorary degree of Doctor of Letters. When presenting him to the president, the University Marshal said of him, "Few of her children, Mr. President, have had as long or as loving a relationship with this University as our next honorand."

From 1946 to 1955, Professor Hammond served as master of Kirkland House, and before that as the first head tutor of Lowell House where, with Professor Julian Lowell Coolidge and President Lowell, he helped to foster the first generation of the House system. He also served for many years on the Committee on Commencement Parts, where he supervised the delivery of the Latin oration; and on the Committee on Seals, Arms, and Diplomas. On the latter

committee he helped to provoke the 'Latin Riots' when he supported President Pusey's view that the College diploma be printed in English, using the practical argument that most undergraduates could not read Latin.

For more than fifty years, from 1936 to 1986, with exceptions for war service and leaves of absence, Hammond was Commencement caller, his Brahmin bray of a voice organizing the Commencement procession from the chaos of the Old Yard, the voice not only of Commencement but of Harvard itself. It was a source of great personal satisfaction to Hammond to have called the procession at the Tercentenary celebrations, and then, fifty years later, at the Three Hundred Fiftieth anniversary celebrations.

In World War II, Hammond served as chief of the section for Monuments, Fine Arts, and Archives in the allied military government, seeing duty in Algiers, Palermo, Naples, London, Paris, Frankfurt, and Berlin. In Berlin, placed in charge of German art works saved from transportation to Russia by General Patton's Third Army, he faced boxes marked 'Rembrandt' and 'Rubens,' which he considered unwise to open; he did, however, open another box, to find an original illustration by Botticelli for Dante's *Divine Comedy*. His work, and that of many others, is recorded in Robert M. Edsel's new book *Rescuing da Vinci*, which shows two photographs of the youthful Lieutenant Colonel Hammond. For his services in the war Hammond was awarded the Bronze Star, and was decorated by the governments of France, Holland, and Italy.

In 1935, Professor Hammond married Florence Hobson Pierson of New Orleans, with whom he had three daughters who added to the splendid domesticity of Kirkland House. His classmate and fellow classicist, John H. Finley, fabled master of Eliot House, once said of his old friend that he "went off to conquer Rome but was conquered by Florence."

Hammond's research and teaching were directed mainly to Roman constitutional history, ancient political thought, and Latin literature. These themes were exemplified in his first and last books, *The Augustan Principate*, 1933; and *The City in the Ancient World*, 1972. He also took a great interest in pedagogy, and all of his students remember the long scrawl of commentary which adorned each of their papers. He was among the few who used Harvard's collection of ancient artifacts to illustrate literary texts and social history, and it was he who established and administered an A.M. in Teaching program for the classics. Furthermore, his edition of Plautus' *Miles Gloriosus* was intended for students.

To Harvard's history he contributed extensively researched monographs on such topics as the stained glass in Memorial Hall, music at Commencement, Harvard china, Latin and Greek inscriptions on College buildings, and the gated enclosures of the Yard.

For nearly seventy-five years Hammond maintained an almost unbroken record of participation in the daily service of Morning Prayers, and long after retirement he nourished his friendships

among undergraduates through regular attendance at the Signet Society, whose graduate board he once served as president. Citizen, scholar, and mentor for longer than most of us have been alive, Mason Hammond loved and served Harvard. We remember him as among the best of a great generation.

*Fautor studiosis, sociis amicus,  
Grammaticae historiae morum magister*

A support to his students, a friend to his colleagues,  
Master of grammar, history, and customs

Respectfully submitted,

Wendell Vernon Clausen†  
Elliot Forbes†  
David G. Mitten  
Zeph Stewart  
Peter J. Gomes, Chair