

Stuart F. McComb
1909-1995

EXECUTIVE DEAN AND PROFESSOR OF EDUCATION, EMERITUS

B.S., Arizona State University; M.S., Ed.D., Education, University of Southern California,
June 14, 1947
California State University, Fullerton, From March 1959 To July 1, 1969
Birth: February 16, 1909; Death: November 4, 1995

William B. Langsdorf, CSUF's founding president, begins this tribute with an appreciation of Stuart McComb's large contributions to his university in its infancy and youth:

"Stuart McComb was the first Executive Dean of Orange County State College (now California State University, Fullerton). In the college's founding year, 1950, he began the planning, and in subsequent years oversaw, the development of its physical plant. Before there was a Chancellor's office or a Board of Trustees, the overall campus plan was largely conceived and permanently committed. In these first years, McComb worked directly with the various state agencies and their bureaucracies. He envisioned a master plan for a large campus of carefully integrated major buildings. In planning these buildings he used with extraordinary skill the complex and prescriptive state formulas to achieve, for an infancy college, results which none of the older colleges had found possible.

"When the Trustees determined that each of the nineteen colleges should develop a campus master plan, that of CSUF was already nearly complete, and in 1963 was the first to be approved. The six initial major university buildings were conceived and with exception of Visual Arts, Health Center, and University Center, initially planned by Stuart McComb. In doing so he relied on the talents of dedicated, resourceful and enthusiastic faculty to develop the educational requirements and specification which the buildings were to satisfy.

"California State University, Fullerton, owes a profound debt of gratitude to Stuart McComb for his farsighted and meticulous planning which resulted in the present beautiful and functional campus."

Stuart Franklin McComb was a unique individual who had a comprehensive and diverse career in public education, ranging from teaching in a two-room rural school house with neither electricity nor plumbing, forth miles from the nearest town, to a major administrative role in a large metropolitan university. He was born in Willow River, Minnesota, the son of two college graduates when that was a rarity, Myra Esther (Finney) McComb and Benjamin Franklin McComb. The McComb family lived and the parents taught in Iowa, North Dakota, Minnesota, and Illinois, before moving west to California in 1917, for the health of Stu's older brother. During the following decade the family lived, educated, and became educated in several California towns, rural and metropolitan. Stuart, the future educational pioneer, was well rehearsed in coping with social diversity and challenge.

Stuart always greeted difficult challenges enthusiastically and thrived on meeting and dealing with the challenge. He was a meticulous planner and paid great attention to detail. He had the ability to adjust when guidelines changed, which happened frequently when he was planning and developing the buildings at California State University, Fullerton. In his boyhood home he learned to articulate his thoughts effectively. Developing this skill to a high degree, he was later able to present his case in a clear, concise, and persuasive way so that voters and public officials would see the value of passing tax overrides for the benefit of

children's education and of building facilities for the use of future generations of college students.

Stuart had great determination, which showed itself at an early age. His parents taught him to delay his immediate gratification for a greater reward in the future, and to be task-oriented. He learned that when there was a job to be done, he was to do it to the best of his ability, no matter how long it took. This work-style remained with him all during his professional life. His family's emphasis on high moral and ethical values also served him well in professional challenges to come. For example, during the time when he was instrumental in the desegregation of the Pasadena schools, there were many who were bitterly opposed to his position and attacked him personally, but he knew it was the right thing to do, so he persevered. He was featured in Life magazine as a standard-bearer for social justice in the U.S.

Upon his college graduation in January, 1929, Stuart and Ruth Mary Mather, a fellow student at Arizona State Teachers College, were married in Flagstaff. In the fall of that year, they both accepted positions to teach in a two-room school, in a very small community called Eagle Creek, Arizona. The McCombs' first daughter, Elinor Ruth was born in Phoenix on April 11, 1932. Young Stuart ("Buddy") passed away in May, 1933, in Phoenix. This was a major tragedy of Stu's life. Their second daughter, Judith Myra, was born in Torrance, California on April 9, 1940. Unfortunately, soon after, Stuart and Ruth were divorced. In 1942, Stuart married Gertrude (Trudy) Warren. Both were teaching in the San Diego schools. By that time World War II was going badly, so Stuart volunteered to serve in the United States Navy. He became a training officer based in San Diego for the rest of the war.

Over a distinguished career Stuart contributed to several national publications: School Business Management, Nation's Schools, and American School Board Journal. He was a member of the following professional organizations: California Association of School Administrators, Association of School Business Officials of the United States and Canada, California Association of Public School Business Officials, National Education Association (Life Member), California Teachers Association, and California Congress of Parents and Teachers (Honorary Life Member).

Stuart was definitely not "all work and no play." He had many outside interests, balancing his professional responsibilities with enthusiasm for his hobbies. His whole life he was enthusiastic about sports. He enjoyed participating as a student; early in his teaching career he was a coach and referee. He also enjoyed watching sporting events, both in person and on television. Stuart also appreciated and participated in music, singing in the choir in high school and church. He just loved to sing for the joy of music. He also taught music while teaching in Colorado. He played the piano, violin, and ukulele.

Future historians of CSUF will be the beneficiaries of another of Stuart McComb's lifetime hobbies. Photography consumed many years and hundreds of rolls of film. He took numerous slides of his family, travels, and career endeavors, including a valuable photographic history of the many buildings going up at his fledgling university. Both before and after his retirement, Stuart traveled extensively, both in this country and abroad, but retirement liberated him and Trudy for even greater enjoyment of visiting new scenes and cultures.

Stuart had to deal with large-money budgets. His responsibilities involved supervising contracts worth \$30 million and facility master planning to transform a 225-acre orange grove into a campus. He had to prepare annually a five-year capital outlay budget based on projected enrollment. The budget had to show justification for each proposed expenditure and ultimately figured in legislative appropriations. Whenever enrollment forecasts changed, he had to revamp his requests accordingly.

Stuart McComb, fortunately for his University, was a man of vision, as well as a consummate professional. The planning and construction activity that took place in the 1960's set the stage for the future of Cal State Fullerton in many ways. The role of the Executive Dean was crucial to the success of those initial developments. These early efforts set the stage for all future planning and design on campus. Precincts were established which continue to make the campus a comfortable place to learn.

Few truly appreciate the complexities involved in planning, designing, and constructing facilities that need to be useful for many decades. That complexity grows when being done in the context of a State University campus. Competing interest on campus vie for priority. Competing interests within a building program then vie for shares of limited space. Once priorities are determined, numerous outsiders must be educated as to the importance of the venture. Those entities include the Chancellor's Office, the Governor's Department of Finance, the Legislative Analyst's Office, and, at times, the Governor and the Legislature themselves. Then, once an appropriation is secured, the process of working with architects, engineers, and contractors can be even more daunting.

During Start McComb's tenure, the following buildings were conceived, funded, designed, and constructed:

1. The "temporary" buildings that housed all the functions of the College in its early days. Those "temporaries" are still here after almost 40 years, and are still useful.
2. McCarthy Hall (originally known as Letters and Science) completed in 1963. This was the first permanent structure on campus. It was designed by the state's Office of Architecture and Construction and is still a serviceable facility, despite OAC efforts to mix both specialized scientific functions with general educational use. It contains over 7 acres of floor space, and must have looked quite odd at the time standing 6 stories above the orange groves. But, had the campus build less densely in those early years, it could not support today's enrollments. Stuart McComb and the early planners had to look far into the future.
3. The Performing Arts Building, completed in 1965.
4. The Physical Education Building, complete the same year.
5. The Bookstore/Commons Building, completed in 1967.
6. The Humanities Building, completed in 1969.
7. The Visual Arts Center, a unique facility, portions of which were completed in 1969.

A major part of the campus at California State University, Fullerton, is, thus, a memorial standing tall to celebrate the life of Stuart McComb. He is remembered also by many colleagues and friends, some of whom date back five, six, or more decades to his days in Flagstaff. Stuart passed away on November 4, 1995 in a convalescent home near his home in Lake San Marcos, at the age of 86, mourned by his daughters, five grandchildren and six great-grandchildren. Few people have had the opportunity to touch the lives of family, friends, colleagues, and generations or students as deeply as Stuart McComb.

Submitted by:

Orrington C. Ramsay, Professor of English, Emeritus

Greatly Assisted by: Judith McComb Allen, Elinor McComb Bowman, and an admiring anonymous colleague who furnished details of the particular buildings Dr. McComb supervised.

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