

University of California: In Memoriam, 1987

Emil M. Mrak, Food Science and Technology: Davis

1901-1987

Chancellor Emeritus

Emil Marcel Mrak, Chancellor Emeritus of the Davis Campus, died April 9, 1987, concluding a vigorous academic and public career spanning nearly sixty years. A respected teacher and researcher, energetic and imaginative administrator, and skilled advisor to government and private agencies, Emil led the Davis Campus through the decade of its greatest growth.

His stewardship brought him lasting respect from faculty, staff, students, administrators, alumni, parents, and educational and political leaders. Emil's leadership was an important contributing factor to Davis' gaining national and international recognition.

Emil Mrak was born in San Francisco on October 27, 1901 and reared in the Santa Clara Valley. On graduation from Campbell High School, his lifelong career in the University of California began. In 1926 he received his B.S. degree from the Berkeley campus in food technology and the M.S. degree in 1928. By the time he completed the Ph.D. also at Berkeley (botany and mycology) in 1936 he had authored or co-authored nearly forty articles. His creative application of science to the solution of practical problems in food processing--the hallmark of his professional career--was clearly established.

Appointed as an instructor in Food Technology in 1937 and rising to the rank of Professor and department chairman in 1948, Emil transferred with most of his staff to a new building on the Davis Campus in 1951 to reorganize and expand the Department of Food Science and Technology on that campus. Under his leadership the department grew in size and diversity of research areas and eventually became one of the top institutions of food research in the world. In spite of his administrative responsibilities, Emil continued his active participation in basic research, which dealt with ecological problems and classification of yeasts in which area he was widely recognized. Two yeast species have been named for him: *Williopsis mrakii* and *Zygosaccharomyces mrakii*. Emil's vigor and intellectual curiosity

— 84 —

made him one of the truly challenging and highly respected teachers on both the Berkeley and Davis campuses. These same traits fostered a rich record of editorial contributions including the long series *Advances in Food Research* for which he served as editor and occasional author. Emil also was an active spokesman in the Academic Senate, contributing significantly to its developing a role of constructive participation in governance on the Davis campus.

On July 1, 1959 Emil began his career as chancellor at Davis. His personal commitment to fostering quality scholarship in all disciplines, his respect for education in the professions, and his perception of what constituted an appropriate intellectual, social, and physical environment for faculty and students were to guide the development of the Davis campus through its most critical formative period. His values were clearly and frequently communicated to the campus community. Informality combined with a high degree of warmth and sensitivity toward faculty, student, and staff needs were carefully balanced with his inherent drive and impatience with those who were slower to recognize and seize on opportunities to strengthen the campus. His style is perhaps best captured in his inaugural address: "The only way to keep this world a good world, and make it better, is to assert creative and constructive individualism, which is, to me, another way of saying 'leadership'."

Emil's enormous energy level, practical understanding of the University's external environment, and ability to communicate with widely diverse groups made him a favorite with the public and particularly with public officials, his administrative colleagues, and members of the Board of Regents, a critical attribute when state and federal

resources were essential to support the campus' growth. The Schools of Law and Medicine, the Colleges of Letters and Science and Engineering, the Graduate Division, the Crocker Nuclear Laboratory, the Agricultural History Center, the Institute of Governmental Affairs, and the California Primate Research Center are examples of additions to the campus during his stewardship.

Emil Mrak contributed extensively nationally and internationally in his professional field throughout his career. A long list of scientific society memberships is highlighted by his election as president and fellow of the Institute of Food Technologists, president of the International Academy of Environmental Safety, president of the International Academy of Sciences, fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, American Public Health Association and American Academy of Arts and Sciences, and co-founder and president of the International Congress of Food Science and Technology. He chaired numerous national organizations and commissions both public and private, including eight assignments with the National Academy of Science/National Research Council. Retiring from the University in 1969, Emil devoted his energies to increased public

— 85 —

service, serving on a number of scientific advisory committees to such agencies as HEW, U.S. Public Health Service, National Institutes of Health, Environmental Protection Agency, and National Science Foundation and on special assignments for the White House related to food quality and safety, environmental quality, and relations with Latin America. The list of contributions to agencies of the State of California is equally prestigious. His scientific talents were instrumental in his appointment to two corporate and one cooperative directorship of food processing companies and a number of national and international foundations supporting various aspects of food preservation. He was awarded honorary degrees from the University of California, Davis, Michigan State University, the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology, and Rutgers University.

Major professional and industrial awards exceed twenty including the Nicholas Appert Medal, the Babcock-Hart, Spencer, Atwater, Tanner, and C.R. Fellers awards, the most prestigious in the field of food science. The administration building on the Davis Campus was named Emil M. Mrak Hall in 1969.

Notwithstanding these accomplishments, Emil maintained an open-door policy throughout his career which significantly extended his personal influence on the lives of students and his associates. He was particularly known for his compassion for people and his intense personal and institutional loyalties.

In spite of the pace of his life, Emil was deeply devoted to his family and influenced significantly their educational and career development. He is survived by his wife, Vera Greaves Mrak, his son Robert Emil Mrak and his daughter Antoinette Vera Hodapp and four grandchildren.

C.O. McCorkle Jr. M.W. Miller R.C. Pearl H.J. Phaff

About this text

Courtesy of University Archives, The Bancroft Library, University of California at Berkeley, Berkeley, CA 94720-6000; <http://bancroft.berkeley.edu/info>

<http://content.cdlib.org/view?docId=hb6z09p0jh&brand=calisphere>

Title: 1987, University of California: In Memoriam

By: University of California (System) Academic Senate, Author

Date: 1987

Contributing Institution: University Archives, The Bancroft Library, University of California at Berkeley, Berkeley, CA 94720-6000; <http://bancroft.berkeley.edu/info>

Copyright Note:

Transmission or reproduction of materials protected by copyright beyond that allowed by fair use requires the written permission of the copyright owners. Works not in the public domain cannot be commercially exploited without permission of the copyright owner. Responsibility for any use rests exclusively with the user

University of California Regents

Academic Senate-Berkeley Division, University of California, 320 Stephens Hall, Berkeley, CA 94720-5842

[Home](#) | [Themed Collections](#) | [California Cultures](#) | [JARDA](#) | [Terms of Use](#) | [Privacy Policy](#) | [Site Map](#)

Calisphere is a service of the [UC Libraries](#), powered by the [California Digital Library](#).

Copyright © 2011 The Regents of The University of California.