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ERNA MARY FERGUSON

1888—1964

We are gathered here to unite in paying a final tribute to the life and memory of our beloved friend, Erna Fergusson, who met death in Albuquerque on July 30, 1964, with characteristic courage. Miss Fergusson was sustained in the final months of her suffering by the beauty of her beloved Sandia Mountains as seen from her armchair on the porch of her Veranda Road home, and comforted in the last weeks of her illness by the presence of her brother, Francis Fergusson, Professor of Comparative Literature at Rutgers University, and her sister, Mrs. C. Spencer Browne, of Berkeley.

It is fitting and proper that these services should be held in the University of New Mexico Memorial Chapel, located on the campus of the University which awarded her a Bachelor of Arts degree in 1912, and in which she always manifested such a great interest, beginning with her activities as a student, which included early-day membership in the Phi Mu sorority and the award to her in 1943 of an honorary degree of Doctor of Letters.

Any program for the benefit of the University of New Mexico, whether it be improvement of the physical plant through construction of new buildings, or any betterment in the courses of study, received her loyal and active support. No program of the "Lectures Under the Stars" was complete without Erna Fergusson's active participation.

Erna Fergusson had a distinguished ancestry on both sides of her family. Her mother was Clara Huning, a daughter of Franz Huning and Ernestine Huning. Franz Huning came to New Mexico in 1853, not long after the American Occupation. He settled in the Rio Grande Valley, made Albuquerque his permanent home, participating to a great extent in the development of the area, particularly after the coming of the railroad in 1880. On the paternal side, Erna's father,

Harvey B. Fergusson, born in Alabama, the son of an officer in the Confederate Army, serving on the staff of Gen. Robert E. Lee, was an outstanding lawyer in the New Mexico of a generation ago. Fate played a part in the lives of Harvey B. Fergusson and Clara Huning, when as a young lawyer Mr. Fergusson came to White Oaks, New Mexico, in 1882, from Wheeling, West Virginia, to represent a client of his firm, Jacob, Oracraft & Fergusson, involved in extensive litigation over the Old Abe Mine. Harvey B. Fergusson and Clara Huning were married in early-day Albuquerque. On January 10, 1888, Erna Fergusson was born, named Ernestine after her grandmother, the name being quickly shortened to Erna.

Erna Fergusson spent her childhood days in and out of the Huning Castle, built on a part of a seven-hundred acre tract of Franz Huning's land. For many years the Castle was a land mark in Albuquerque. In childhood Erna learned the German language from her grandparents; and she learned Spanish from playmates in Old Albuquerque, a language which she later studied seriously, and in which she became fluent. A part of Erna's childhood and girlhood was spent in Washington, D.C., where her father was a Delegate in Congress, having been elected from New Mexico to the Fifty-fifth Congress, serving from March 4, 1897 until March 3, 1899. He was subsequently elected as a member of the Sixty-second Congress in the first State election, serving from January 8, 1912 until March 3, 1915. While a delegate in Congress, Mr. Fergusson was successful, on June 21, 1898, in obtaining the passage of the Fergusson Act, a vastly important statute which granted to New Mexico four million acres of public domain in trust for the use and benefit in perpetuity of the common schools of New Mexico.

Educated in Albuquerque, and in Washington, D.C., Erna Fergusson was graduated in 1906 from the Albuquerque High School. Like so many young women of her time, she began a teaching career after taking a one-year normal course at the University of New Mexico. She taught in the

grades at the Fourth Ward School at Sixth Street between Roma and Fruit Avenues. The building in which she taught was torn down some thirty years ago, and replaced by the more modern Lew Wallace School. Recognizing the need for further education, Erna Fergusson returned to the University of New Mexico, obtaining a B.A. degree in 1912, then went to Columbia University, from which she received an M.A. degree in 1913. Returning to Albuquerque she taught history in the Albuquerque High School. When World War I began Erna Fergusson was anxious to do something for her country to satisfy the patriotic instinct with which she was endowed. The American Red Cross seemed to be the place where her talents would fit best. During 1918 and 1919 she traveled all over New Mexico, by train, automobile, horseback, and at times on foot, doing Red Cross work, helping the soldiers at the front, and their families at home. Needless to say, during this period her ability to speak Spanish was a great asset.

With World War I at an end, and Red Cross days behind her, reluctant to return to schoolteaching, Erna Fergusson went to work as a reporter for the Albuquerque Herald, no longer published, with the late Horace Brand Hening as the editor. While working on the Herald, Erna Fergusson formed a partnership with Miss Ethel Hickey, for years a member of the faculty of the University of New Mexico, engaging in what they were pleased to call the "dude wrangling business." Together they guided tourists to the Indian Pueblos in New Mexico, to the Navajo Reservation in New Mexico and Arizona, to the Hopi Indian snake dances. Later on, when the Santa Fe Railroad began its Indian Detour Service, Erna Fergusson was employed to organize and direct the Detour couriers. It was while visiting the Indian Pueblos and the Indian reservations that Erna Fergusson, already steeped in the lore of Bandelier, of Charles F. Lummis, and through study of the Hemenway Expedition Reports, began serious study of the three cultures, Indian, Spanish, and Anglo, which directed much of the future course of her life.

Erna Fergusson's career as a writer began quite by chance. Witter Bynner, the poet, introduced her in Santa Fe to Alfred Knopf, a New York publisher. Interested in Miss Fergusson's conversation about Indians and Indian dances, Mr. Knopf encouraged her to write a book about her experiences. As a result, *Dancing Gods* was published by Knopf in 1931. This book was an immediate success. To this day it stands unsurpassed as an authentic, readable work on southwestern Indians and their ceremonials. The value of the book was enhanced by the fact that a number of prominent Taos and Santa Fe artists, in a spirit of friendship and generosity, gave her permission to illustrate her book with their paintings. Those who have read *Dancing Gods* will recall the reproduction of famous paintings by Robert Henri, Walter Ufer, E. L. Blumenschein, Gerald Cassidy, John Sloan, Theodore Van Soelen, Will Schuster, Andrew Dasburg, Frank Aplegate, Olive Rush, Victor Higgins and others. *Dancing Gods* was later republished by the University of New Mexico Press. With the success of *Dancing Gods*, Erna Fergusson began an entirely new career, which subsequently led to national recognition as an authority on the Southwest, from the dual aspect of author, and lecturer.

During the thirty years of her creative literary work, with Knopf as publisher, Erna Fergusson wrote book after book significantly indicating her far-flung interest in Latin American countries: *Fiesta in Mexico* (1934), *Guatemala* (1937), *Venezuela* (1939), *Chile* (1943), *Cuba* (1946). From the aspect of research, her work was authentic. She spent many months in each country of which she wrote; from the aspect of writing she was a meticulous workman; she would not tolerate the superficial impression, or the generalized expression.

Raymond Holden, writing in the *New York Times* on November 25, 1951, about Erna Fergusson's *New Mexico, A Pageant of Three Peoples*, published in 1951, said among other things:

This portrait of New Mexico is a real work of art. It is a difficult task to paint the portrait of a region, to give it all its dimensions, its color and its life. When the region is one whose history covers the field of human activity from prehistoric man through the Conquistadores to the manufacturers of the atomic bomb and whose topography ranges from sandy desert to pine-clad peaks the task is even more difficult.

A Pageant of Three Peoples is scheduled for reissue in a revised edition on August 24 of this year, by Alfred Knopf, emphasizing the accuracy of Mr. Holden's review.

Turning from faraway places, Erna Fergusson was the author of two books of peculiar local interest. In 1947 she wrote *Albuquerque*, published by Armitage. This book could only have been written by someone with much knowledge of early-day Albuquerque, and a great love of early-day people. In 1948 her book *Murder and Mystery in New Mexico*, was published by Merle Armitage; illustrated by Peter Hurd, of San Patricio, New Mexico. In this volume, Erna selected some of the notorious crimes which had been committed during the previous sixty years, and gave her version of the mysteries which surrounded them. She dedicated the book to her father, Harvey Butler Fergusson, "who believed in law and order." This book was an outstanding success.

After the shadows closed in on Erna Fergusson, she was still hopeful that she might live to see the publication of her book on Clyde Tingley, long-time mayor of Albuquerque, and for four years Governor of New Mexico. She had spent a great deal of time and labor in putting this book together. She had interviewed Mr. Tingley many times, and had obtained the benefit of his recollections. All those who were acquainted with Clyde Tingley in his lifetime will realize that Erna Fergusson, in attempting to write about him, had undertaken something very difficult. Governor Tingley was not a man given to keeping a diary, to saving any letters he received, or to keeping carbon copies of his correspondence. During the latter months of the Governor's life his memory

was not too reliable. Desiring to have the book about Clyde Tingley accurate and fair to all concerned, living or dead, Erna worked diligently on it. Unfortunately, she died with the manuscript still unfinished, but there is no doubt but that friends will write the closing words and that the book will be published.

Erna Fergusson's friends and admirers crisscrossed the country. Authors, poets, publishers of national repute always called on her when in or near Albuquerque. New Mexico writers in particular through the years paid her special tributes of friendship and devotion, among them Paul Horgan, Witter Bynner, the late Oliver La Farge, the late Haniel Long, and Angelico Chavez.

Erna Fergusson's contributions to this community, to New Mexico and its people, were significant, important and of enduring quality. Active participation in civic projects spanned her zeal for saving her beloved cottonwood trees from the inroads of a bulldozer to the preservation of our heritage through the medium of the Old Albuquerque Historical Society. Her roots went deep into the soil of New Mexico. She loved it with a passion. New Mexicans were always proud of the fact that she never had any desire to make her home elsewhere.

In recalling her outstanding characteristics, one remembers especially her loyalty to family, friends, political party; her sparkling wit; her tolerance, and her compassionate interest in humanity.

Countless friends will cherish her memory always, knowing that her life has enriched theirs.

W. A. KELEHER*

* Address delivered by Mr. Keleher at the Memorial Services on August 1, 1964.