

Sturla Einarsson

1879-1974

PROFESSOR OF ASTRONOMY, EMERITUS

AND

DIRECTOR OF LEUSCHNER OBSERVATORY, EMERITUS

Sturla Einarsson died on March 25, 1974, at the age of 94. His many friends will particularly remember his great personal warmth, his rich family life, and his devotion to a variety of organizations in which he had long been deeply involved.

Einarsson was born in Iceland on December 14, 1879. His parents immigrated to America and settled in Duluth, Minnesota, when he was a child of only four, so practically all his life was spent in the United States. The transition to America was not without difficulties for the family. Sturla Einarsson's father, as a younger son, had to make his own way and to establish his family on his own, in accord with Icelandic traditions. His older brother, again by tradition, received the lion's share of what the family could provide. He attended university and became an actor of major stature in Iceland.

As a child in Duluth, Einarsson attended grade school and graduated from high school rather late, at age 21. (He was fond of telling that he remained in the first grade for three years—since he heard Icelandic at home, he had to learn English at school.) He attended business college for a year, but his interest was in more academic pursuits. He thought of becoming a high school teacher. A friend of the family recognized Einarsson's intellectual potential and offered to lend him the money to attend the university. Einarsson seized the opportunity, enrolled in the University of Minnesota in 1901, and received his A.B. degree in 1905. During his junior and senior years at Minnesota, Einarsson served as assistant in astronomy. That set the course of his life.

Immediately after he received his A.B. degree, he was invited (by A.O. Leuschner) to come to Berkeley as an assistant in practical astronomy and to pursue graduate studies in astronomy. He came—and never left! He was assistant in practical astronomy from 1905 to 1910; Instructor in practical astronomy from 1910 to 1918 (he received his Ph.D. degree in 1913 for a thesis entitled "On the Orbits of Minor Planets (624) Hector

and (588) Achilles of the Trojan Group); Assistant Professor of Practical Astronomy from 1918 to 1920; Associate Professor from 1920 to 1928; and Professor in 1928. He was chairman of the department from 1946 to 1950, the year of his retirement.

Einarsson was an excellent teacher; he was clear, direct, always ready with an example, and had a deep interest in his students. His work tended strongly toward the practical aspects of astronomy—the determination of time and position on the earth, and surveying. For more than forty years Einarsson taught very nearly all the classes in astronomy for engineers in the fields of surveying and practical astronomy. And for many years he was one of the instructors in Civil Engineering 103, the summer surveying camp of four weeks duration, which he appears to have greatly enjoyed.

Einarsson's expertise in practical astronomy led to service as an instructor in navigation during both World Wars. In 1917-18, he was in charge of instruction at the United States Shipping Board Navigation School in San Francisco and the Commissioned Officers Training School of the United States Navy. After World War I, Einarsson taught navigation on a regular basis in the astronomy department at Berkeley. In the 1930s and later, his classes became the Naval ROTC upper-division courses in navigation. The S.S. *Golden Bear*, the large, steerable model ship on which all advanced navigation students learned to compensate the compass, and large numbers of students "shooting" the sun with sextants were familiar sights in the central courtyard of the students' observatory at the foot of Euclid Avenue. During World War II, enormous numbers of "ninety-day wonders" were taught by Einarsson, his collaborators, and his assistants.

Einarsson was an active participant in a number of academic, astronomical, and social organizations. The knowledge he had gained from business college was frequently put to good use. Einarsson was the perennial secretary-treasurer, a conservative, steady influence in the financial decisions of many organizations. He was secretary-treasurer of The Faculty Club for twenty-nine years, from 1929 to 1958. (Many will remember him as a familiar figure each day at lunch at "The Club" at the exclusive "statesmen's" table.) He was secretary-treasurer of the Astronomical Society of the Pacific from 1950 to 1965. He was greatly interested in the Astronomical Society and guided it through its most active period of financial growth. It is the solid financial base put down during Einarsson's tenure that has enabled the Society to expand into the many new educational and scientific activities in which it is now engaged. Einarsson was one of the founders of the California Chapter of the American Scandinavian Foundation and served as its secretary-treasurer for many years. He was an honorary member of the Foundation when he died.

In 1914, Einarsson married Anna Rodman Kidder, who was then a graduate assistant in Astronomy. Their shared interests and her New England

upbringing, sense of community responsibility, and love of the outdoors, produced an active, happy home. Their four children are Alfred, Elizabeth (Cook), Margaret (Dechant), and John.

Family outings, particularly in summer were frequent. A family camping trip to Echo Lake in 1927 was especially memorable. They found a choice bit of land to be available there, and the next year built a cabin so they could spend a part of each summer amid the rugged beauty of the Sierra. The cabin remains a family treasure to be used by Einarsson's now-three-generations of descendants.

Anna Einarsson died in 1940. In 1946 Einarsson married Thea Hustvet, whom he met through his sister. Thea, who was trained in business, assisted Einarsson in his work with the Astronomical Society of the Pacific. For some years after Einarsson retired as an officer of the Society, Thea helped guide the destinies of the Society as assistant secretary-treasurer.

Thea survives Einarsson, as do his four children, six grandchildren, and one great-grandchild.

The quiet, solid success of Einarsson's long and productive life stemmed from ability, perseverance, and the boldness to seize opportunity when presented, combined with humor, honesty, and a strong sense of community. Parts of his biography read like incidents in a novel set in an earlier, simpler America that was vigorous, interesting, and full of opportunity. Many look at such a time with considerable nostalgia.

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In Memoriam

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