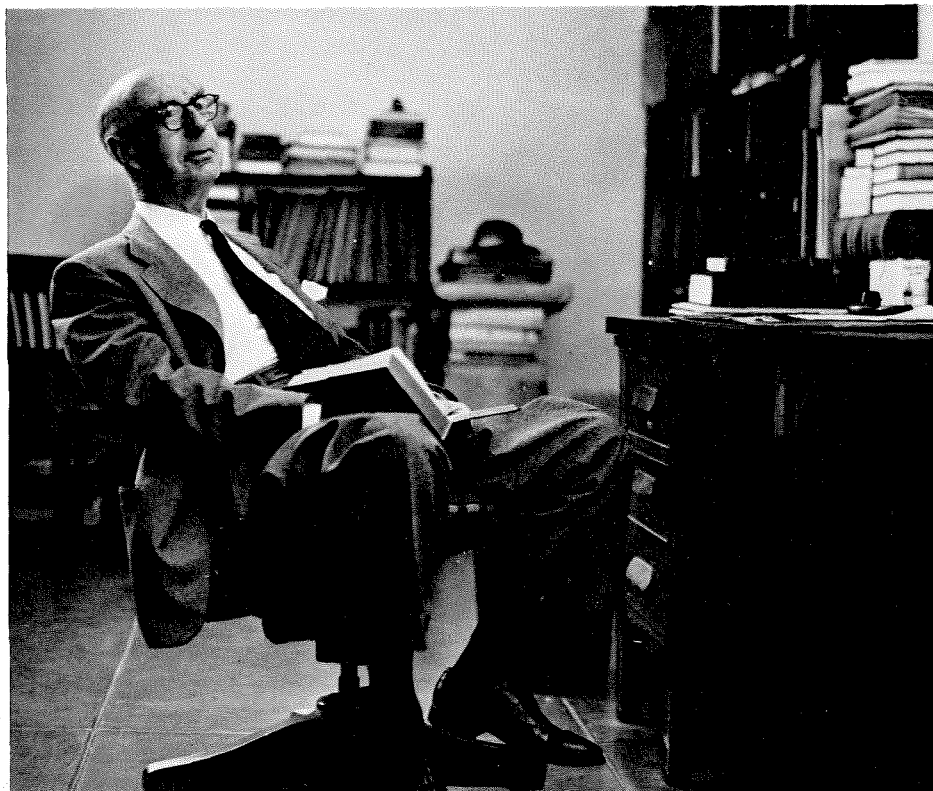


George MacMinn 1884-1972

On October first, George R. MacMinn, professor of English emeritus, died in his home only a few blocks from the Institute. Professor MacMinn was one of the very few left of those who came to the Institute before it was Caltech; he arrived from Berkeley as associate professor of English in 1918 and retired in 1954. After 36 years of teaching at Caltech, he is probably remembered by more alumni than almost any other faculty member. In addition to the usual classes offered over the years by the English department, he taught courses in journalism, technical writing, American literature, and literature of the Bible. (One story has it that this preacher's son opened his classes in the Bible by making some offhand reference to God and then announcing: "And that, gentlemen, is the last time I shall utter that name in this course." It was Jehovah all the way.)

Coming to Caltech from managing the University of California Press at Berkeley, he organized the Caltech Press Club, and was for years the faculty adviser to the *California Tech*. Those who knew him well remember that he savored good journalism and the elegant phrase until the end of his life. He organized the first student dramatic club to put on modern plays. (Caltech had a tradition, which lasted into the early thirties, of producing Greek and Latin plays in translation.)

Born in New Jersey in 1884, George MacMinn received his AB from Brown University, and then as a young man



went west, via Iowa State University and the University of California. And his intellectual interests went with him. In 1941 he published *The Theater of the Golden Age in California*, the pioneer study of the fabulous and bewildering theatrical life that hastened, like camp followers, to California after the gold rush. Much of his research for this book was done at the Huntington Library, where he is still warmly remembered after a third of a century. Out of his interests in teaching came two college texts, *Essays in Exposition* and *College Readings in the Modern Short Story*, the latter in collaboration with his good friend and colleague Harvey Eagleson. Before his death he had completed for publication a book-length manuscript, *Imagery in the Poetry of the Old Testament*. And among his papers there were enough lyric poems, both occasional and general, to more than make up a volume.

George MacMinn maintained a living interest in Caltech, especially in the humanities division, throughout his 18 years of retirement. This interest was fed in large part by his friends, and until his last year no news of the division, no publication—and not too much gossip—escaped his notice and, usually, his comment. But essentially his years of retirement he considered private years. He continued to live, as he always had, the life of a curable romantic; and he cured with a well-polished Stoic crust, which he used to protect himself and (especially after the death of his wife, Evelyn, in 1966) to save his friends from exposure to his own sometimes fretted nerves. His great loves continued to be music, especially Mozart and Vivaldi, and language. Elegance of diction earned his greatest respect, but a good pun always made him merry. He carried on long, delighted correspondences with persons whose minds he loved to taste, even when he had never seen them. Like a true romantic he loved, as he put it, "to squeeze the juice" out of an experience; and in his determinedly private retirement years even the simplest thing could be turned into an adventure—the blossoming of a jacaranda tree, the clear note of a lark, or shadows on the mountains.

—Beach Langston
Associate Professor of English