



## Paul C. Eaton

### An Appreciation

by ROBERT HUTTENBACK  
*Chairman of the Division of  
Humanities and Social Sciences*

**P**AUL Eaton, who died in Kennebunkport, Maine, on the 17th of September, aged 69, came to Caltech from MIT in 1946 as a visiting lecturer in English and the following year was promoted to associate professor of English and associate dean of students. In 1953 he became dean of students, a post he held until 1969. Dean Eaton was married to the noted actress Katherine Emery Eaton, and his two children, Rebecca and Jay, attended Polytechnic School.

These are the cold facts of the case. They do not tell you much about the man — that he was a warm, compassionate human being who cared a lot about his fellows and especially about the students and faculty of the Institute.

I owe a lot to Paul Eaton; if it were not for him I would not be here. Paul, who was interested in everything that went on at Caltech, in the autumn of 1951 appeared at one of the games of the Institute soccer team, which I was at that time coaching. We had so few spectators in those days that I used to thank each one personally for coming. In this way I met Paul, and we were soon firm friends.

Time marched on, and I became a graduate student and went off to India. There, I suddenly received a telegram from Paul asking if I would be interested in becoming master of the student houses. I accepted, and my professional relationship with Paul Eaton commenced.

Paul was a delightful man to work with. He was always filled with good humor. He might not always approve of what you were doing, but he never second-guessed you. His conduct of the dean's office was a wonderful blend of idealism and prag-

matism. He never overadministered or exaggerated the importance of a trivial problem. I recall a disciplinary committee appointed by President DuBridge to deal with the case of a student who had engaged in carnal extracurricular activities in his room with the daughter of a prominent movie star who demanded his punishment. Paul thought awhile and concluded that as the episode took place during the young man's physical education hour, and hence was within the period when women were permitted to visit the student houses, no rule had actually been broken. Consequently, he urged that the culprit merely be asked to move out of the student houses so that he could indulge his whims more freely.

On another occasion, Paul was faced with the problem of one of the few truly detestable students ever to disfigure the Caltech campus. The problem was that this unpleasant fellow had good grades and was always within the law. Happily, this was in the days before due process, and when the young man failed physical education, a heinous crime for which ineligibility to register for the next term was prescribed, Paul convinced the Committee on Academic Standards and Honors not to readmit him.

A "down Easter" who never looked really comfortable in the West, Paul loved the sea and served the Navy with distinction during World War II. He had an encyclopedic knowledge of naval history, and when he walked he always seemed to be striding a quarterdeck. He was a wonderful conversationalist and a much sought after luncheon companion in the Athenaeum.

Paul was a true appreciator of Bourbon whiskey, and that plus the fascinating game of "mountain golf" allowed him to survive the annual visits to freshman camp at Camp Radford which he rarely looked forward to.

In his last report to the president as dean of students Paul Eaton wrote eloquently about the Caltech he loved:

Between September of 1947 and June of 1969 very little of what I was able to accomplish was the sole result of my own efforts or abilities. Most of what can be recalled with satisfaction was achieved through the whole-hearted cooperation . . . of a host of students, professors, administrators, trustees, coaches, doctors, secretaries, resident associates, business officers, and others of the campus community.

This is the spirit in which the Caltech student, whether he realizes its value at the time or not, lives and has his being during his undergraduate years. It makes possible the continued success of the Honor System, the student houses . . . student participation in the general governance, the athletic, service and cultural programs, and — one continually confides — the absence of the need to adopt disruptive means of redress of grievance.

During my early days at the Institute, I can hardly remember any major faculty committee on which Paul Eaton did not serve. He was for years a member of the Admissions Committee, and I doubt that it has ever been the same since his departure. He was also a stalwart of the Committee on Student Houses, the Committee on Academic Standards and Honors, the Student-Faculty Relations Committee, the Health Committee, the Scholarships and Financial Aid Committee, the Upperclass Admissions Committee and the Faculty Board. He was chairman of the committee which drew up the specifications for the Beckman Auditorium. As an English teacher, Paul was both demanding and popular. He was a significant example of a unique Caltech breed, the scholar-teacher-administrator.

When Paul resigned as dean of students, I was privileged to take his place. It was a hard act to follow, for Paul was a unique person. He was much loved by generations of Caltech students and by his colleagues and will be sorely missed. □