

HARRY P. MERA, 1875 - 1951

THE PASSING OF DR. HARRY P. MERA, on April 15th, brought to a close an outstanding career in the archaeology of the Southwest, extending well over a quarter century. His many activities in this field had made his name well known to scores of fellow workers. His prominence in the affairs of the Southwest Division of American Association for the Advancement of Science had brought him a wide acquaintance with a host of others engaged in varied branches of science.

Though Dr. Mera was closely identified with the Southwest, he had had an interesting and varied career in other parts of the United States before settling in Santa Fe. Born in 1875, the eldest son of a practising physician, he spent his early years in Detroit. Following graduation from high school he gained two years experience in the field of commercial art in New York, followed by a year in the mines of Leadville, Colorado, before deciding to follow in the footsteps of his father. Graduating from Ohio State University in 1899, he practised medicine in Detroit until 1905 when he found occasion to spend a few years in Santa Fe. There he developed a deep and abiding interest in the Southwest which was to bring him back on several occasions during his twenty years of practise in Abilene, Kansas.

On settling permanently in Santa Fe in 1922, he spent the following eight years as county health officer, an appointment that enabled him to make frequent visits to the neighboring pueblos and archaeological sites. He then began his archaeological survey and his sherd collections from dozens of previously unrecorded sites. At the same time, deploring the rapid disappearance of the native arts of the modern Pueblo Indians, he was one of a small group who banded together to interest others in the possibility of saving choice examples of this material for permanent exhibition in Santa Fe. This activity, with Dr. Mera serving for many years as chairman, soon led to a thriving organization incorporated in 1926 as the Indian Arts Fund, which was destined to pave the way for the entry of the Laboratory of Anthropology into the southwestern field.

In 1929 Dr. Mera began his full time activities with the newly organized Laboratory, as curator of archaeology. With his well developed sherd collection as a nucleus, and with the cooperation of several volunteer workers in the field he built up the Laboratory's extensive "sherd library" of samplings from over 2000 sites in the Southwest. In addition he continued his active part in acquiring material for the general collections of the Laboratory and the Indian Arts Fund, with special emphasis on the arts of the southwestern tribes. For several years he carried on exploration and excavations in various areas of New Mexico, thus providing important material for his department.

With all these resources at hand, he entered on his most prolific years of writing, as attested by his extensive bibliography. For his works he prepared his own maps and much of the illustrative material, including hundreds of his meticulous drawings of intricate designs. At the same time he participated in the numerous conferences of archaeologists and in the meetings of the Southwestern Division of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, in which

(Continued on page 48)

he served successively as chairman of Social Sciences, as executive committeeman, and finally as president of the Division.

In 1936 Dr. Mera suffered a severe coronary attack, the first of several which led finally to his retirement from the Laboratory in 1946. Yet in the intervening ten years, while his condition to some extent curtailed his field activities, he kept at his studies with remarkable perseverance and was busily engaged with his writing until recent months. He leaves a wife whose constant care prolonged his productive years, two sons and two daughters, and grandchildren who can look with pride on his life work.

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