



Dr. Robert T. Oliver

May 29, 2000

Dr. Robert T. Oliver of Heron Point in Chestertown, MD, died of heart failure on Monday, May 29, 2000, at Kent & Queen Anne's Hospital. He was 90 years old.

Dr. Oliver, an educator, writer, and counselor on international affairs, was born in Sweet Home, OR, on July 7, 1909, the son of the late Harry and Iris Oliver, farmers who had eight children. He graduated from St. Helens High School and from Pacific University; and, in 1933, won his Masters of Arts degree from the University of Oregon.

For the next two years, 1933-1935, in the depth of the Great Depression, he lived in Vancouver, WA, as founder and executive director of Clark Community College, which has grown as one of the leading community colleges in the nation with an enrollment of over 15,000 students and an endowment (unique among community colleges) of some eighteen million dollars.

In 1936, Dr. Oliver went to Madison, WI, to the Graduate School of the University of Wisconsin, where he earned his PH.D. in speech communications. He joined the faculty of Bucknell University, where during the next five years he published three national used textbooks in speech and was elected President of the Speech Association of Pennsylvania.

When the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor and the United States joined World War II, Dr. Oliver was called to Washington, DC, as Assistant Director of the Victory Speakers Bureau in the office of Civilian Defense. Several weeks later, he was named Chief of the National Food Conservation Office in the War Foods Department.

After the defeat of Germany, Dr. Oliver was named Associate Professor of Speech in Syracuse University. In January 1947, he was recalled to Washington as an advisor to Dr. Syngman Rhee, leader of the Korean independence movement, and the founding President of the Republic of Korea. For two years, he remained in Washington as Chief of the Korean Research and Information Office and as President Rhee's liaison with the United States Government. He continued to serve as President Rhee's Advisor on International Affairs until the termination of the Rhee presidency in 1960.

In September of 1949, Dr. Oliver was appointed Professor and Head of the Speech Department at Pennsylvania State University, and, by special arrangement, he continued to serve the Korean government as President Rhee's advisor, as consultant to Korean Delegations at the United Nations, to various international conferences, and as liaison between the Korean and American governments during the Korean War and the latter period of rebuilding the war that devastated the Korean Peninsula.

During the course of his educational career, Dr. Oliver wrote more than fifty textbooks and reference books on various aspects of speech, on cross-cultural communication, on Asian history, and on Korea. Two of his books, "Why War Came in Korea" in 1952, and "Syngman Rhee: The Man Behind the Myth" in 1954, were named by the New York Times in its selection of "The Best Books of the Year." Six of his books, those dealing with Asian affairs, have been translated into Korean, Japanese, and Chinese. Two of his books,

The Psychology of Persuasive Speech and History of Public Speaking in America, served as guiding influences in the field. Two of his textbooks went through four and five revisions and reprints as leading textbooks. Noted by book reviewers as “prodigiously prolific,” from his thirtieth to his eighty-third year, Dr. Oliver’s book publications averaged one a year. Concurrently, he wrote well over a hundred articles for journals ranging from The Readers Digest to scholarly quarterlies.

He has been honored by election as President of the Pennsylvania State Speech Association, the Speech Association of the Eastern States, and the National Speech Association. In 1949, his alma mater, Pacific University, awarded him its honorary Doctorate of Laws. He also has been named as Adjunct Professor by Arizona State University as an Honorary Professor of Public Affairs by Myongji University in Korea. He has been invited as Visiting Professor by State Universities in Lubbock, TX, in Los Angeles, CA, and in Oregon. In 1957, he served as Educational Consultant to the Education Departments in Australia’s Provinces by invitation of the Australian government and by appointment by the U.S. Department of State. He has lectured professionally in every part of the United States, in Korea, and in Japan. In March 1959, he was awarded Korea’s highest civilian award, the Presidential Medal.

Dr. Oliver’s career has been summarized in many biographical volumes, including Who’s Who in America, Who’s Who in the East, Who’s Who in the South, Who’s Who in the West, The Writers Directory and American Authors.

After his retirement in 1970 from Pennsylvania State University, he continued his writings and travel. He was appointed to four sequential terms as Research Fellow in the East-West Center of Honolulu, Hawaii, where he and his wife spent their winters. He as often refereed to himself as “among the

luckiest fellows on earth.”

Among his survivors are his widow, Pauline Shivery Oliver; his two sons, Robert, who lives in Berkeley, CA, and Dennis, who lives in Durham, England; five grandchildren; and three great-grandchildren.

A memorial service will be held at a later date.

Memorial contributions can be made to the Benevolent Fund at Heron Point, 501 E. Campus Road, Chestertown, MD 21620.

Tribute Wall



“ *Dr. Robert T. Oliver*

October 26, 2023 at 06:42 PM



“ *Dr. Robert T. Oliver*

January 28, 2023 at 12:44 PM



“ *Dr. Robert T. Oliver*

January 28, 2023 at 08:03 AM