

Seth A. Fessenden
1903 - 1976
PROFESSOR OF SPEECH, EMERITUS

B. A., M. A., University of Illinois; Ph.D., Education, New York University,
June 11, 1941
California State University, Fullerton From September 1, 1959 To July 12, 1976
Birth: September 29, 1903; Death: July 12, 1976

Dr. Seth A. Fessenden came to Orange County State College in 1959 as one of the five initial full-time members appointed to the faculty. He was professor of Speech and Education, Chairman of the Division of Communication and Chairman of the Speech Department. During 1960-61 Seth served as Chairman of the Executive Committee of Faculty Council, committee on Teacher Education and the Foundation Board of Trustees. He was elected many times for Faculty Council, was Chairman of Past Committee, and Faculty Affairs committee. At the time he received Emeritus status, President Donald Shields stated, "your contribution to this institution has been substantial and distinguished. Over the years you have provided strong leadership; you have added to the stature of the University by helping to develop the educational structure and academic programs; you have had a significant influence in determining general University policies."

Seth received his B. A. and M. A. in Speech at the University of Illinois and his Ph.D. from New York University. His career in the field of speech began in 1922 when he was on the debate team at the University of Illinois. He later became a high school teacher of speech in Carbondale, Illinois. In 1937 he was appointed Assistant Professor at Eastern Illinois University. After receiving his Ph.D. he became Professor and Chairman of Speech at West Texas State College in 1941. In 1943, he held the same position at Cornell College in Iowa. Seth went to the University of Denver in 1948 to be the Director of Graduate Studies in Speech. He continued post graduate work and in 1954 he was a Danforth Scholar at USC. He then moved to Montana State University to be the Director of Graduate Studies.

Seth was lured to come to California with his wife and three children in 1957 to become a Research Consultant for Toastmasters International. While he was working in this position, Dr. William Langsdorf invited him to join the faculty.

Throughout his career, Seth published or co-authored sixteen books, eight pamphlets, and thirty-three articles. He is listed in various editions of *Who's Who in the West*, *Who's Who in Education*, *Who Knows and What*, *American Men of Science*, and *Leaders in Education*. But most of all, Seth liked teaching and interacting with students. He was always available for students and was known for his unique classroom methods for that time. Never content with past approaches, not satisfied by standard techniques, he

constantly searched for new ways to communicate material and his enthusiasm for his field.

As the late Dr. Lee Granell, who succeeded Seth as Chair of the Department after Seth's nine-year term, stated, "At all times his obvious concern for the welfare of the student takes precedence over predetermined development of content. It follows from this that students who enroll in his classes have an opportunity to participate in the design of those courses. Dr. Fessenden refuses to approach his courses didactically and this forces each student to determine for himself what it is he needs to know and then to go out to discover what knowledge is available. Beyond this, Dr. Fessenden places great emphasis on assignments which demand effort, thus encouraging students to approach the learning process in cooperation with others. Seth was the stereotyped "grand old professor" of the 40's. He was always dressed very conservatively in a white shirt and tie, never without a coat. Although the snow-white hair would have gone with this type-casting, the crewcut did not. He was a willing listener to all and he truly loved the University. It was his second home.

The speech department had a surprise party for him when he retired in 1973 and invited former students and colleagues to pay tribute to him. The note he wrote the next day said, "The meeting and dinner last night was the most wonderful thing that ever happened to me. My deepest wish is that whether it comes as a surprise or not, whether it be for the same kind of an occasion, whether the event be big or small, each of you will experience the thrill, the excitement, the awe that was mine."

After his retirement, he continued to come to the campus everyday. He was working on another publication and was in the Media Center on that fateful summer morning in 1976 when his life and six others were ended by a demented gunman.

Indeed, this institution and the community it serves have benefitted richly from his dedicated service, his counsel, and his talents.

Submitted by
Kaye M. Good
Professor of Speech Communication
May 31, 1985