
Obituary

Frank Blair Hanson 1886-1945

In his twofold career as a teacher and investigator in zoology and as an officer of the Rockefeller Foundation, Dr. Hanson contributed importantly in the development of modern biology and natural science. To all who had the privilege of knowing him intimately, his passing on 21 July last has been the source of deep regret. He will be remembered as a highly respected teacher, an effective and productive investigator, an able administrator, and a most congenial companion.

Dr. Hanson's forebears traveled to Ohio in a covered wagon, and his family settled in Bloomington, Illinois, where he was born on 15 July 1886. As a youth he aspired to a professional career, but financial exigencies required that he make his own way after graduation from high school. While working at a government post in Washington he attended evening school at George Washington University, from which institution he received a scholarship in 1909 and a bachelor's degree in 1913. A course in zoology, taken as a formal requirement, awakened his interest and determined the course of his future career. After graduate work at the University of Illinois he was appointed instructor in zoology at Washington University, St. Louis, in 1916. The department, then housed in the basement of the Chemistry Department, was later shifted to a wooden building left over after World War I. With the late Caswell Grave, who came as head of the department in 1919, Dr. Hanson helped to plan the excellent new quarters of the department in Rebstock Hall and to develop, from inauspicious beginnings, a highly effective Zoology Department.

Appointed professor of zoology in 1924, he became one of the university's prominent figures. His lectures, given largely without notes, were unusually lucid. His genial and mellow sense of humor, frequently embellished with a delightful whimsey of expression, was completely his own. His enthusiasm for research, unaccompanied by emotional display, kindled a like spirit in his students, many of whom now occupy important posts in biology and medicine.

Author of some fifty publications, his interest first centered in comparative anatomy and embryology.

In 1923 he became interested in genetics. Following a period with Professor Muller in 1927, his investigations were concerned almost exclusively with radiation genetics, a field in which he made important contributions. Particularly significant was his demonstration that radiation-induced gene mutations occur in proportion to the induced ionization, one mutation resulting from one quantum exchange.

Dr. Hanson's association with the Rockefeller Foundation began when he served as assistant in the European fellowship program of the Foundation from 1930 to 1932. A year after he returned to Washington University he joined the permanent staff of the Foundation and in 1936 he became associate director of the natural sciences division. His wide interest in scientific matters, quiet temperament, and unquestionable integrity made him well suited for this position. He was a sympathetic but undemonstrative listener and his judgments on matters of research grants were fair and impartial.

The Marine Biological Laboratory at Woods Hole was close to Dr. Hanson's heart. He overlooked no opportunity to further the work of that important center of biological research. In many ways the outstanding library of the Marine Biological Laboratory may be considered a lasting monument in his memory. With his family, Dr. Hanson delighted to spend the summers at Woods Hole.

Never robust in health, Dr. Hanson's ability to carry on in spite of a heart condition, probably contracted in his youth, is a tribute to his courage and determination. In each phase of his career he was aided by the care and assistance of his devoted wife, the former Harriet Roman Cavender, whom he married in 1910 while still an undergraduate in Washington.

Dr. Hanson's last weeks were saddened by notification that his son, Lt. Frank Blair Hanson, Jr., had been lost with his ship, a destroyer escort sunk in the Atlantic by a German submarine a few days before V-E Day. This loss was naturally a great blow and seemed to contribute to his ill health.

Besides his wife, Dr. Hanson is survived by two daughters, Miss Blair Hanson, assistant professor of French at Allegheny College, and Dr. Phyllis Claire Hanson, assistant in pathology at the University of Rochester.

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