DOCUMENTS AND MINUTES OF THE GENERAL FACULTY

REPORT OF THE MEMORIAL RESOLUTION COMMITTEE FOR
HERBERT H. LIEBHAFSKY

The special committee of the General Faculty to prepare a Memorial Resolution for Herbert H. Liebhafsky, Professor Emeritus, Department of Economics, has filed with the Secretary of the General Faculty the following report.

H. Paul Kelley, Secretary
The General Faculty

IN MEMORIAM

HERBERT H. LIEBHAFSKY

Professor Emeritus Herbert Hugo Liebhafsky, a vital member of the Department of Economics for nearly thirty-three years, died on January 21, 1993. It is with warm memories and great respect that we recall his full and productive life, his profound influence on thousands of students, and his most valuable contribution to the University and his profession as teacher and scholar.

Professor Liebhafsky, known affectionately to his associates and other friends, and by his preference, as “Lieb,” was born on March 10, 1919, the son of Hugo and Aurelia Demel Liebhafsky, in Shiner, Texas. After graduating from high school there, he entered Texas A & M College (now University) in the fall of 1936. Majoring in economics, he took the B.A. and M.S. degrees there in 1940 and 1941, respectively.

In September of 1941 he enrolled in the doctoral program in economics at the University of Texas (at Austin), but this new phase of his education was cut short by the attack on Pearl Harbor and the declaration of war against the United States by Germany. Having had officer training as a member of the Corps of Cadets at Texas A & M, Lieb reported for active duty in the Army as a 2nd Lieutenant on February 15, 1942. He served with distinction in combat with the 95th Infantry Division in the European theater (Bronze Star) and in the Military Government following the German surrender (letter of commendation). In the latter assignment, for which he volunteered, he was commanding officer of a detachment administering the civil government and economic affairs of a German county (Hunfeld) having a civilian population of about 100,000. In the course of his many administrative duties he intervened personally to save the famed Lippizaner Stallions from destruction. Those with whom he was intimately acquainted say that the experience most profoundly and permanently affecting his life stemmed from his investigations in connection with the Holocaust.

Lieb was released to inactive duty on August 13, 1946, with the rank of Major. (A decade later he retired from the Reserves with the rank of Lt. Colonel.) Upon returning to the States, he entered the University of Michigan Law School, taking the J.D. degree in the spring of 1949. He married Nancy Minette Boyle on June 8, 1949, and four years later legally adopted and gave his name to her daughter by a previous marriage, Lesley Minette.
During the period September, 1949, to September, 1953, Lieb worked as international economist in the State Department in Washington. Then he enrolled in the University of Michigan Graduate School, taking the Ph.D. degree in economics in the spring of 1956. For his first-place paper in the 1955 comprehensive examination in economic theory, he received the prestigious Fred M. Taylor Award in Economic Theory. In the same year he was inducted into the Phi Kappa Phi Honor Society.

In the fall of 1956 Lieb came back home to Texas with an appointment as assistant professor in the Department of Economics, U.T. Austin. He was promoted to the rank of associate professor only two years later, and to the rank of full professor only four years after that. Those six years were obviously full of professional accomplishments, successes in the classroom, and other contributions to the University. Lieb’s bibliography is appended. But as a simple list it cannot convey the importance of his work. His articles were published in some of the most prestigious journals, including *The American Economic Review, Quarterly Journal of Economics, Journal of Political Economy, The Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science, and The Indian Journal of Economics*. Toward the end of his career he published six major articles in *The Journal of Economic Issues*, helping raise this journal focusing on institutional economics from relative obscurity to prominence.

But his two books, one in two foreign editions, gave his thought the broadest impact and permanent influence. The first, *The Nature of Price Theory*, although basically and widely used as a textbook, was unique in two ways: it contained important original contributions, largely in appendixes, and it took a critical approach to its subject. For these reasons, it was often adopted for graduate theory courses. In its first year (1963) it was adopted at 61 colleges and universities in the United States, including Harvard, Yale, Princeton, University of California—Berkeley, Stanford, Wisconsin, Michigan, Duke, and Colorado. It went into a second American edition five years later, and Indonesian and Hindi editions still later. His second book, *American Government and Business*, was also unique in being based on both economic theory and actual cases in law. Here Liebhafsky the lawyer-economist could utilize his skills to full effect in reaching advanced students not only in economics, but in business and law as well.

Lieb was an outstanding classroom teacher. He was demanding and had no patience with students not prepared to work hard, but he was also giving and generous with his time to serious and capable students. In formal student evaluations, particularly at the graduate level, he was typically rated in the top five to ten percent of all professors being evaluated. Twice, by two different chairmen, he was nominated for prestigious awards for excellence in teaching, first (1958) for the Lemuel Scarbrough Foundation Award and second (1983) for the Excellence in Graduate Teaching Award.

The excellence of Lieb the teacher is best seen through the eyes of two of his most devoted students, Sanford Marble and Brian Trinque, whose own words follow:

Lieb was one of those fine teachers who can satisfy the instinctive requirement that learning be exciting. He clearly enjoyed the exercise of hard thinking and loved those moments in which a pertinent question creates new possibilities. But such moments were, for him, not merely results worth the effort. He taught that, as a source of practical novelty and joy, inquiry represents one of the fountains of life, and that such a resource is worth defending. Thus, he was vitally engaged in the project of making room for new questions. He declared that the vague use of accepted ideas “blocked inquiry” and demanded that the limits of old concepts be made plain.

Characteristically, in his methods class, Lieb prepared students for the study of economics by introducing them to the history, in primary sources, of attempts to define the criteria of valid inquiry. Our study of what guarantees there might be for the validity of conclusions became one of how to earn the right to expect to be taken seriously. This class, like all of his graduate courses, consisted mostly of
student presentations and discussion. Lieb listened closely and made occasional comments—usually in the form of questions—as we moved through his amazingly detailed reading lists. He wanted to know what we thought about the foundations of an author’s logic, for instance, or whether there were actually differences in the practical consequences implied by the systems before us.

Lieb had an infectious humor and he used it often. In response to someone’s use of the phrase “in principle” he might say, with a loaded grin and telling emphasis, that “In price theory, in principle, consumer choices are purely voluntary.” And he would leave it there, still grinning. He also had a fine sense of the absurd, and enjoyed the fact that a piece of his, entitled “The Rational Consumer’s Demand for Psychiatric Care,” had been published as a comment in the AER. When he learned of a proof that social welfare functions and dictatorships are topologically equivalent, he quipped—as a corollary—that “there is a social welfare function for every dictator.”

Lieb came to teach economics at the University of Texas because “Clarence Ayres was here.” He got great satisfaction from the strong intellectual empathy and solid friendship that developed between them. Fortunately for his later students, he stayed on after Ayres left and continued to share his intelligence, his humor and, above all, his love of rigorous inquiry.

Shortly after retiring from the UT faculty in January of 1989, Lieb moved into the Clairmont Retirement Community in Austin. There he met a widow, Winifred H. Rylander, who was to become his second wife on March 6, 1991. She died on September 4, 1992, predeceasing Lieb by about four months.

Lieb is survived by his daughter, Lesley Liebhafsky Simmons, and her two children, Freddy Mellott and Jennifer Yvonne Mellott, of Houston, Texas; a sister, Hertha Liebhafsky Buske of Shiner, Texas; and a brother, Erwin E. Liebhafsky of Richmond, Texas.

This Memorial Resolution was prepared by a special committee consisting of Professor Stephen L. McDonald (Chair), Professor F. Tomasson Jannuzi, and Professor Daniel C. Morgan.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

Books:


Chapters:


Foreword:


Articles:


Distributed to Voting and Emeritus Members of the faculty of the Department of Economics, the Dean of the College of Liberal Arts, the Executive Vice President and Provost, and the President on August 31, 1995.