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Abstract


The collection includes biographical information, publications list, miscellaneous correspondence, documents related to the Hope College Administrative Affairs Board, Conference on Christianity and Literature, curriculum reform, Department of English, his work as editor of Perspectives magazine, and samples of his calligraphic work. Also included are selections of his published works.

Accession No.: H98-1332
Provenance: Francis G. Fike
Donor: Francis G. Fike
Photographs: 4 images (Box 1)
Processed by: Alicia Irvine, February 2000
Catherine Jung, April 2007

Biography

Francis George Fike was born in 1933, in Meridale, New York. Until the age of eight, he lived with his family first in Delhi, New York, then in Oneonta, New York. Upon the death of his mother in 1941, he moved to his grandparents’ farm west of Rome, New York, attended Wood Creek School and Verona High School, graduating as Salutatorian in 1950. He attended Duke University on a tuition scholarship, majoring in English. At Duke, he served on the Editorial Board of the campus literary magazine, The Archive, was a member of the Wesley Players (a drama group sponsored by the Wesley Foundation), a member of Le Cercle Francais (honorary society of students in French), Kappa Chi (Pre-ministerial Fraternity), and graduated Phi Beta Kappa in 1954. At Duke, he took a class taught by the young professor and poet Edgar Bowers, who encouraged him in his writing of poetry and told him of the poetry fellowship at Stanford University. Fike applied for the fellowship in his senior year, but did not receive one of the two fellowships available, one of which went to Thom Gunn, an English poet newly arrived in America. The director of the poetry program, Yvor Winters, counseled him to apply again in the future.
Continuing his plan of entering the ministry in the Methodist Church, he applied for and received a scholarship at Union Theological Seminary, which he entered in the fall of 1954, studying with theologians Reinhold Neibuh, Paul Tillich and Robert McAfee Brown. He majored in Systematic Theology and graduated with a B.D. (later changed to M.Div.) degree in 1957. During the summers between his Junior and Senior years at the Seminary in 1955 and 1956, he held full-time pastorates at two-church Methodist parishes in upstate New York. In his senior year at Union, he applied once again for the creative writing fellowship at Stanford, received one, and was granted an appointment for further study at Stanford by the Church. In his senior year at Union in 1956, he married Joan Elizabeth Cook. In the summer of 1957, he served as pastor in the Greater Western Adirondack Parish—four churches in Wanakena, Cranberry Lake, Star Lake, and Newton Falls. Two children would be born in California—Matthew Allen, b.1960, and Deborah Jean, b.1962.

At Stanford, he studied the writing of poetry with Yvor Winters and, in the first year there, completed the courses and requirements for a Master’s degree. He then had to decide whether to return to the east and a pastorate, or remain at Stanford for the Ph.D. He was advised by Robert Jones, his District Superintendent of the Northern New York Conference of the Methodist Church, that if a degree were desirable, it would be wise to work on it before assuming pastoral duties in the east. At that time, the Chairman of the Department of English at Stanford offered him a place as Teaching Assistant in the Department for 1958-1959. He accepted, entered the Ph.D. program, majored in English Literature of the Nineteenth Century with a Minor in American Literature, wrote a dissertation under the direction of Prof. William Irvine on the topic “The Influence of John Ruskin Upon the Poetic Theory and Practice of Gerard Manley Hopkins,” and received the degree in 1964. In 1961, the Department asked him to serve as Assistant Director of Freshman English at Stanford, a post he filled until 1963, the year in which he received offers of appointment from Ohio State University, Southern Methodist University and inquiries from other places such as the University of Rochester in New York. After an interview in San Francisco with its Provost, Cornell University invited him to join the Department of English at Cornell as Instructor. While at Stanford, serving first as Teaching Assistant (part-time), 1958-1961, and later as Acting Instructor (full-time), 1961-1963, he discovered a vocation for teaching, and was given a Special Appointment by the Church to Cornell University, where he served as Instructor (1963-1965) and Assistant Professor (1965-1968). At Cornell, he was Director of Freshman Humanities Seminar 137 (Poetry), and Chairman of the Honors Thesis-Grading Committee. He was on the Editorial Board of Epoch, the literary magazine at Cornell.

In 1968, after considering other invitations, he chose one as Associate Professor in the Department of English at Hope College, again receiving a Special Appointment from the Church to that post. In 1984, he was promoted to the rank of Professor. At Hope College, he taught courses in The Romantic Period, The Victorian Period, The English Lyric, World Literature I & II, Freshman Composition, Advanced Writing, The Writing of Poetry, The Short Story, Practical Criticism, Literary Criticism, Survey of English Literature, American Literature, and Modern Poetry. He was one of the early participants in the Senior Seminar (IDS) program, and for many years taught a seminar with varying materials under the title “Contemporary Literature and Christian Faith.” In his early years at Hope, he proposed a change which was adopted in the teaching of Freshman English from the mono-topic course to multi-topic courses on subjects and materials chosen by individual instructors, with all using a composition handbook in common. During the years of teaching the course, he designed courses with various topics, including
“Man’s Search For Meaning,” “Nature and Man,” “Fields of Writing,” “Writing About Literature,” and “Medicine and Literature.”

In the years 1968-1998, his poetry and articles appeared in various publications. His articles ranged from essays on authors in the Romantic and Victorian periods to American poetry to his experiences with the red fox. He wrote many reviews of books in and out of his field. Collections of his poetry appeared in five books, the last published in 2003 after his retirement. In 1995, he was invited to become Poetry Editor of Perspectives, a post which he held until 2006.

While at Hope, he served on several committees, and participated in several summer seminars sponsored by IDS for teachers of the Senior Seminar. He was a member of The Modern Language Association, The Conference on Christianity and Literature and the International Hopkins Association. For many years, he served as Hope College’s representative at the Board Meetings of the Christian Scholar’s Review. He presented papers at the conferences of Christianity and Literature. During the years of his time at Hope, he was a founding member of the Phi Beta Kappa Chapter at Hope, and served as member of the Phi Beta Kappa Membership Election Committee, Faculty Advisor to Lambda Iota Tau (English Honor Society), Chair of the Curriculum Committee (1983-84), member of the Academic Affairs Board, member and Secretary of the NCA Self-Study Committee on Academic Programs, Faculty Representative-Member and Secretary of the Board of Trustees Committee on Honorary Degrees and Citations, member of the Humanities Fair Planning Committee, and member of the Financial Advisory Committee. Exercising his interest in calligraphy, he inscribed the honors designations on the diplomas of graduating Hope College seniors from 1969 until the college switched to mechanical printing in 1994.

His wife, Joan, died in 1986, after a year-long struggle with cancer. In 1994, he married Janice Steen. He retired from Hope College in 1998, and has continued teaching as opportunities present themselves at the Hope Academy of Senior Professionals and in churches as invited.

Scope and Content

The collection includes biographical information, correspondence concerning the Hope College Administrative Affairs Board, Conference on Christianity, curriculum reform, the English department, editorial work with Perspectives magazine, examples of his calligraphic works, and memorabilia. Also included is a sampling of his many published works. Collection is arranged alphabetically and chronologically by subject.

Container List

Box 1

Personnel File, 1973-1993 (RESTRICTED)
Administrative Affairs Board, 1968-1992
Biographical, 1969-2003
Calligraphy, worksheets, samples, notes
Conference on Christianity and Literature, 1982
Correspondence

Colleagues, n.d., 1967-2004
Students, 1971-2004 (4 images)
Curriculum Reform, 1985
Departmental Review, 1982
Library, 1971, 1983
Memorabilia, 1968-1988

*Perspectives*
- Memorabilia, n.d.
- Poet correspondence, 1995-2005 (8 folders)
- Poetry editor, 1995-2005
- Poetry editor, editorial work, 1995-2005 (2 folders)
- Editor transition, 2005
- Unusual submissions, 1995, 2002
Proposal, Summer Workshop, 1975

Box 2

*Underbrush*, 1986
*In the Same Rivers*, 1989
- “Summer Praise,” *Perspectives*, 1994

Publication list, 1961-2003