

EDWIN W. (ED) GASTON, JR.: IN MEMORIAM

Edwin W. (Ed) Gaston, Jr. once said that, if he had had “but world enough and time”, he would have explored more deeply some of his many interests. As it was, he packed into his eighty and more years that ended October 12, 2007 generous samplings of business, higher education, print-radio-TV journalism and scholarly writing.

Gaston’s business interests informed his early and late years. A fourth-generation native of Nacogdoches, he was associated with Cason, Monk and company, a hardware, funeral and furniture concern of which his paternal grandfather was one of the founders. And he succeeded both his grandfather and father on the board of directors of that company. Also in his late years, Gaston served on the board of directors of Superior Federal Savings Bank that had grown out of Nacogdoches Savings and Loan.

It was higher education, however, that attracted Gaston for nearly all of his professional life. Born two years after Stephen F. Austin State University opened its doors, Gaston literally grew up with the institution, earning bachelor’s and master’s degrees there and then serving it as an administrator and professor for nearly forty years. At the time of his retirement from SFASU, Gaston was vice president for academic affairs, the second highest position in the administration. He was the first SFASU graduate to hold that position.

Gaston was led by journalism to his positions at SFASU. Before joining the U.S. Marine Corps in World War II, he served as reporter and sports editor of the Nacogdoches Daily Sentinel. Then, after the war, he served that newspaper as news editor before becoming editor and publisher of the Garrison, Texas News. SFASU employed Gaston as student publication supervisor, public information officer, and journalism teacher. During his years with the

newspapers and early in his career at SFASU, Gaston did free-lance writing for metropolitan newspapers, newspaper syndicates and magazines.

While earning a Ph.D. degree at Texas Tech University, Gaston worked part-time as editor of the Texas Music Educator magazine and a public information officer for the border Intercollegiate Athletic Conference.

Related to his newspaper and magazine work had been Gaston's radio and television news reporting and sports broadcasting. Gaston was a member of the original staff of radio station KOSF (later KEEE) and was the first radio play-by-play announcer of high school and college sports in Nacogdoches. With his fellow SFASU faculty member Dr. Joe Ericson, Gaston presented a weekly telecast of SFASU news and features for KTRE-TV. He also appeared in special features on television stations in Shreveport and other cities.

Gaston's sports interests originated with reading about the St. Louis baseball "Cardinals" famed "Gashouse Gang" and subsequent teams. "I rejoice when the 'Cardinals' win," he once said, "and die a little bit every time they lose." In high school, Gaston was a member of the famed 1941 Nacogdoches "Dragon" football team that, predicted to finish last in district play, won the championship. From 1983-2002, when his brother Don F. Gaston owned the Boston "Celtics" professional basketball team, Gaston was an avid National Basketball Association fan.

But Gaston's international professional reputation rests on his teaching and scholarly writing for which he received "distinguished professor" awards from the University of Helsinki, Finland, where he lectured under a Fulbright award; SFASU; Texas Tech; the Alpha Chi national scholarship society, for which Gaston served twelve years as national president; and the Association of College Honor societies.

Gaston's scholarly writing included five books, the first of which The Early Novel of the Southwest was published in 1961 by the University of New Mexico Press under a Ford Foundation grant for seminal studies. Of his other four books, Gaston's distinguished American Authors Series volume and its later revised edition on the novelist Conrad Richter was published domestically and then translated into Portuguese and published in Brazil. His book Eugene Manlove Rhodes inspects the life and works of the New Mexico horse wrangler, many of whose novels were adapted for motion pictures. Still other of Gaston's publications were articles in anthologies, biographical dictionaries, encyclopedias and journals.

In reviewing Gaston's academic career, his colleague and famed folklorist Dr. Francis E. Abernethy said that Gaston "served the highest standards of academic excellence in his teaching, his scholarship and his administration." He added that, as an administrator, Gaston "presided over good and stable times that were so because he made them so."

Gaston himself, however, always took a more modest view of his achievements. He frequently attributed them to "luck." And he frequently cited what his friend, the author and humorist, James Ward Lee once said tongue-in-cheek: Ed Gaston has been "once a scholar, once a professor, once a dean, and once" an academic vice president, but "despite all those chances to go bad, he remained a man of wit and humor."