

## **FERNANDO EUGENE ROPSHAW** **1909 to 1983**

Fernando Eugene Ropshaw was a member of Friends Meeting of Washington for 34 years. His death occurred on February 15, 1983, as the result of a heart attack suffered while he was shoveling snow at his Alexandria, Virginia home. He was 74 years old. Having a strong dislike for his given names, Fernando Eugene, he preferred to be called by his initials, F.E. Indeed, "Rope" was the name he liked best--and so he was known among family members and friends. In order that his sons not feel embarrassed by the names they had been given, their father made it clear they might change their names to any others of their choice. This is only one of many reasons why F.E. Ropshaw's three sons - Joe (who chose to be called Ted), Peter and Paul - are blessed with the memory of a wise, understanding and kind father.

Born in Berlin, Germany in the pre-World War I years, Fernando Ropshaw's childhood was sadly affected by the War and its aftermath. To his father, a physician, the effect of malnutrition on the young children of Germany was of particular concern. When Fernando was 12, Dr. Ropshaw moved his family to the United States, where they lived in a German community in Ohio. The Ropshaws were happy with the freedom, security and plenty of America, yet they could not totally free themselves from the ill effects of long deprivation. It was an embarrassment to Fernando that his hair turned completely white while he was in high school.

The family was particularly grateful for the educational opportunities they found in Ohio. Fernando earned both a bachelor's and a law degree at what is now Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland. In appreciation for the advantages that were his as a young American, he became a sincere patriot who resolved to serve his country in every possible way. During World War II, he worked with Military Intelligence. Later he was employed by the Department of the Army, then, the Department of State.

F.E. Ropshaw left government service for just a short time, while he was employed by the Quaker-owned Scull-Craft Printers in suburban Virginia. Scull-Craft was located near the Ropshaw home and the Burgundy Farm School, where Fernando's wife, Maxine, was a teacher and his sons were students.

When he returned to Civil Service, it was with the District of Columbia Government, as an administrative secretary to the District's three Commissioners, who were soon to be replaced by a Mayor-Commissioner. F.E. Ropshaw helped to smooth the transition by becoming the executive secretary for Washington's first mayor, Walter E. Washington. Later, assignments in the District Building included administrative posts in the departments that oversee licensing and commissions, and the retirement funds for firemen and policemen. Fernando Ropshaw retired in 1974 and enjoyed living and working for some years on a farm, with his family, in southern Maryland. After his first marriage had ended in divorce, he married Catherine Frenzi, of Alexandria, Virginia. They were living in Alexandria at the time of his death.

The Ropshaw family's relationship with Friends Meeting of Washington began in the First Day School, where Maxine and Fernando enrolled their sons Joe (more often called Ted) and Peter. In 1949 they became members of the Meeting. Fernando Ropshaw's quiet presence, with his

family, in our Meetings for Worship was an inspiration. According to his handwritten note sent to the Meeting office shortly after he became a Friend, he took satisfaction in the fact that he was able to transfer his employment from the Department of the Army to the Department of State, where he would be working in a field more closely allied with Quaker principles.

Hardships in the beginning of one's life sometimes are incentives to the building of good character. For F.E. Ropshaw this was true. His sense of obligation to his adopted country made him a dedicated, patriotic citizen. And, like Robert Louis Stevenson, who in adversity prayed for "courage, gaiety and a quiet mind," Fernando Ropshaw became courageous and calm. Yet, according to a friend and colleague, it was hard for Rope to exhibit gaiety. However, his wry smile and a sense of humor served him well. His sons remember their father as a tower of quiet strength. This memory will continue to be a benediction.