**Fern Ferguson**

People today remember Fern Ferguson as a thin, frail elderly man who spent summers at *Fernwood*, his home at the southern corner of Brooker Hollow and Alvord Roads, near the former lands of the Scripture family, his maternal ancestors. They remember his gracious and courtly manner as, despite his being semi-invalid, he guided them on a tour of his rose garden. They remember his collection of miniature banks that owed to his profession. They remember his quiet, unassuming hospitality as he offered tea, or a dish of vanilla ice cream topped by crème de menthe.

People remember the passion that animated Fern Ferguson when he talked about “old times” and brought out a volume or two of the colorful illustrations and personal reminiscences that he had gathered through research and local interviews undertaken over the decades of his retirement. They remember his calm patience with newer and less seasoned historians and their stumbles.

Mostly, though, people remember his deep love for his native town, where his grandfather John Ferguson had settled on West Hill in the 1850’s, where his father Silas had become a prominent business person and civic leader, and where his half-brother Mel became President of the Bank of Worcester. This love moved him to chronicle the town’s history in warm accounts of friends, neighbors and families and their daily livelihoods; schools and businesses; churches and organizations; pastimes and social lives. And he did so masterfully, not in dry chronologies or genealogical recitations – although he could also do that if need be – but in rich, stream-of-consciousness stories crammed with the personal, the unique and the lively. In addition, his history of East Worcester, part of the 1953 *Town of Worcester History*, is the only one ever published.

William Fern Ferguson was born in Worcester in 1884. As a young child, he occasionally skipped school to help editor Agnes Smith put out *The Worcester Times*. He served as a naval officer in World War I. He lived in New Rochelle and became an executive at the Bank for Savings in New York City.

Ferguson’s contribution to his hometown was not limited to its local history. In his retirement he received high regard for his benefaction. He helped sustain the Wieting Association and the East Worcester Fire Department, among other organizations. He was a moving force in the Worcester Improvement Association and provided funds for the establishment of the business district parking lot on Decatur Street. His was the guiding hand for the Maple View Cemetery, where he now rests.

After the Worcester Historical Society emerged in 1970, Fern Ferguson became a mainstay. The present Society rooms and museum enjoyed his eager support and provided a home for his 20 original volumes, now collectively called *The Works of W. Fern Ferguson*, following his death in 1977.The local community would have lost immediate access to these books and they would have headed for archives elsewhere, much as had the work of Ida Flint Shafer – a prior local historian – if the Historical Society had not been available to receive them. Even so, they were almost lost, being heavily damaged by water in the Worcester Great Fire of 1994. They were miraculously rescued and salvaged through the heroic efforts of C.R. Jones of the New York State Historical Association, who used quick-freeze and slow-dry technology to restore them.

Fern Ferguson also willed *Fernwood* to the Historical Society in his estate, and its subsequent sale has greatly enhanced the organization’s financial security.

The Worcester Historical Society owes a great debt to Fern Ferguson, not only for his support and generosity, but also because it is the custodian of his precious life’s work – an endowment that has already suffered a close call with destruction, and a priceless legacy which needs to be printed both to inform and entertain the public and to ensure its own preservation. It is in this spirit of redemption, gratitude and service that the Worcester Historical Society now offers this reproduction of Volume I of *The Works of W. Fern Ferguson*, with others to follow. Let this series be the Society’s respectful tribute to Fern Ferguson, and to his gifts to Worcester and the world.

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