

MEMORIAL RESOLUTION

CLAUDE M. SIMPSON, JR.
(1910 – 1976)

When a good man dies, we have a custom of summarizing and recording his character and career, not for the melancholy gratification of realizing what we have lost, but because we want to remind ourselves of what he has left us as accomplishment and example. The colleagues, friends, and students of Claude Simpson are all richer for the breadth and depth of his knowledge, the steadiness of his wisdom, and the warmth of his friendship.

He was born in Kansas City, Missouri, on July 29, 1910, the son of a Methodist minister, and received most of his early education in Texas. After two years at Austin College in Sherman, Texas, he transferred to Southern Methodist University in Dallas, from which he was graduated at the age of twenty with two baccalaureate degrees, one in mathematics and German and one in music. A graduate year at Southern Methodist gave him a master's degree in English and American Literature, and in 1936 he received his Ph.D. from Harvard University, concentrating in philology, especially American dialects.

His experience as a teacher spanned the continent. Beginning at East Carolina College (1935-1936), he moved on to the University of Wisconsin (1936-19'09), Harvard (1939-1942), Ohio State University (1947-1964), and finally Stanford, to whose faculty he was appointed as Coe Professor of American Literature in 1964. In 1973 he elected early retirement and took a position as Associate at the Huntington Library in San Marino, California. Between his service at Harvard and that at Ohio State, he was for three years a navigation instructor in Naval Aviation, rising from Lieutenant, J.G., to Lieutenant Commander.

Always a dedicated teacher, sometimes an administrator by force of circumstances and the pressure of his colleagues, he never ceased to be a learner, and through more than forty years he was a highly productive scholar, combining his interest in linguistics, music, and literary history and criticism in unique ways. Through his publications and through his membership in the American Folklore Society, the Ohio Folklore Society, and the International Folk Music Council, he was a major influence upon the developing field of American folklore and balladry. His long list of publications in music includes everything from editions of Bach chorales and Mozart duets to arrangements of Elizabethan and Jacobean rounds and catches for four recorders. In literature he wrote on a great variety of subjects from early Rhode Island pronunciation to the publication problems of Thomas Wolfe. He edited numerous influential anthologies and editions of individual works.

For all his versatility, he knew how to clean up something he began. His *British Broadside Ballads and Their Music* (1966), is a work awesomely meticulous and thorough, one that will dominate the field for decades to come. His editions of *The House of Seven Gables*, *The Marble Faun*, *Our Old Home* and *The American Notebooks*, done for the Modern Language Association's Centenary Edition of Hawthorne's works, are as close to definitive as these things can be made. Both the variety and the thoroughness of Claude Simpson's scholarship were widely acknowledged, with the result that during his ten years of service at Stanford he guided

more graduate students through to their degrees, and directed more theses and dissertations, than any two or three of his colleagues combined.

So far the academic, a paradigm of the scholar-teacher. But Claude Simpson was more than a well-stacked, flexible, and judicious mind, and people sought him out as often for the pleasure of his company as for the wealth of his information or the soundness of his advice. He could play on any instrument, apparently, five minutes after picking it up. He was a fine organist, a virtuoso on the recorder, a marvelous pianist. He had perfect pitch and an infallible memory. It seemed like he knew every song ever written -- and if he had temporarily forgotten it, he could reconstruct it in thirty seconds if given a hint of the tune.

His friends will remember him as they so often saw him at parties, sitting relaxed in the role of a honky tonk piano player, a cigar drooping from his lips, his hat on the back of his head, his hands modulating swiftly from key to key in search of one that the company's voices could sing, his eye squinting at the ceiling as he improvised musical portraits or felt out a half-forgotten tune, his mood shifting from convivial to serious as his hands went smoothly from Boogie to Bach or ragtime to Ravel. He was a great, good, gifted, unsolemn man, and he will be missed.

He died in Pasadena, California on April 5, 1976. Elizabeth, his wife of more than forty years, survives him, as do a sister, Helen Culler, and a brother, Warren Simpson.

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