

DOCUMENTS OF THE GENERAL FACULTY

**REPORT OF THE MEMORIAL RESOLUTION COMMITTEE FOR
BARNES F. LATHROP**

The special committee of the General Faculty to prepare a memorial resolution for Barnes F. Lathrop, professor emeritus, history, has filed with the Secretary of the General Faculty the following report.

John R. Durbin, Secretary
The General Faculty

**IN MEMORIAM
BARNES F. LATHROP**

Barnes Fletcher Lathrop, a major figure in the Department of History at The University of Texas at Austin for more than three decades, died at the age of 90 on July 17, 1999, after a long illness. He left a legacy as an exceptionally able trainer of professional historians.

Barnes Lathrop was born on March 29, 1909, in Morgan City, Louisiana. He was reared in Texas, where his parents moved when he was four years old. He attended the public schools of Alvin, Texas, and earned degrees from the Rice Institute (BA 1930), the University of Chicago (MA 1931), and The University of Texas (PhD 1945). On September 9, 1930, just before entering graduate school at the University of Chicago, he married Mary Betty Weatherred, with whom he had a son, Barnes Fletcher, and a daughter, Irene. The couple spent a year at Chicago, then returned to Texas so Lathrop could continue his education at Rice, where he was a teaching fellow from 1933 to 1935. He left Rice to accept a fellowship at The University of Texas and to take advantage of an opportunity to work under Charles W. Ramsdell, a leading historian of the Confederacy. When Lathrop was named a research associate in 1937, he and Mrs. Lathrop began a two-year pioneering venture, traveling widely throughout the South, Northeast, and Midwest, microfilming manuscripts and pamphlets pertinent to southern history. They returned to Austin in 1939, with 400 reels of film reproducing more than 350,000 pages of material, having completed an endeavor that anticipated a later revolution in the use of microforms to build research collections.

Promoted to instructor in the Department of History in 1939, Lathrop began a teaching career at the University that spanned nearly 40 years. Promoted to assistant professor in 1945, associate professor in 1949, and professor in 1953, he served as chairman of the department 1953-54 and 1955-56, and as graduate adviser 1951-53. He also labored as an uncommonly diligent member of departmental committees. His able performance of the hard and thankless tasks necessary to the operation of a large academic department prompted Walter Prescott Webb to describe him as the colleague "whose realism serves to keep our feet near the ground." Although peers might disagree with Lathrop's views, they could be certain that he expressed opinions only after careful study and with the best interest of the department in mind.

Lathrop taught various subjects during his tenure, but he specialized in the American South between 1828 and 1877. His undergraduate and graduate courses on Jacksonian America and on the Civil War and Reconstruction, together with graduate courses on historical method and bibliographic guides to American history, were fixtures among the offerings of the Department of History. All of Lathrop's classes demonstrated meticulous preparation, combining rigorous attention to detail with rich content that derived from his obvious mastery of an enormous body of historical sources. Students recalling his Civil War class often exchanged memories such as soldiers from the same unit swap stories, and the highlight of such discussions inevitably centered on a legendary final exam that exceeded in difficulty anything most of the takers had experienced.

Although Lathrop always taught undergraduates, he was pre-eminently a graduate professor who devoted his professional life to the training of historians. More than 40 dissertations carried his signature as director, many of which turned into books. Veterans of Lathrop's tutelage benefited from his devotion to the highest scholarly standards and his disinclination to accept simple answers to historical questions. Receptive to any sound methodology and tolerant of subjects that ranged across a wide spectrum, Lathrop had no interest in channeling students into particular areas of inquiry or converting them to his point of view so they could go forth as

disciples of the master. He did insist on solid research and unerringly pointed out sloppiness of thought or expression. Comments on returned papers or dissertation chapters often resembled tiny hieroglyphs and on some pages, crammed into every available blank space, exceeded the number of words contributed by the author. His sensitivity to nuances of written and oral language equipped him equally well to improve a manuscript or to appraise an individual. Students could not count on Lathrop's approbation, but they could be certain that he judged their work honestly.

Lathrop published one book, a score of articles and edited documents, and some two dozen book reviews. Most of his publications clustered in the areas of methodology and southern history. His book *Migration Into East Texas, 1835-1860: A Study from the United States Census* represented a path-breaking effort to exploit the manuscript census returns as a source for historical research. The child-ladder method of determining migration that Lathrop introduced in the book drew warm praise from reviewers, one of whom described it as "a significant contribution to the field of research methods" put together "with infinite patience." Several of Lathrop's articles grew out of extensive work on a group of Louisiana sugar planters and their families during the Civil War era. All of Lathrop's published work, including his substantive and sometimes salty book reviews, exhibited precision of thought and literary execution.

Lathrop displayed a long-term interest in the collections of historical material at The University of Texas. Much of his activity in this regard came as a trustee of the Littlefield Fund for Southern History, a post to which he was named in 1952. The fund's principal trustee for 27 years, he oversaw expenditures that greatly improved the University's already substantial holdings. The staff of the library recognized his labors in 1966 when it named him a "Faculty Fellow of the Staff Association of The University of Texas Libraries" in recognition of his "distinguished contributions to library development" on the Austin campus.

Barnes F. Lathrop's publications, his tours of duty on the executive council and the board of editors of the Southern Historical Association, and his stint as a visiting professor at Rice University in 1964 influenced a constituency beyond The University of Texas. But his greatest legacy is the company of well-trained historians he sent into the profession. At numerous schools in the greater Southwest and beyond, his students attained positions of considerable responsibility, published widely, and tutored other generations of historians. Through his students, he quietly left his mark on his native region and on the historical profession.

This memorial resolution was prepared by a special committee consisting of Professors Gary W. Gallagher, Michael G. Hall, Lewis L. Gould, and Norman D. Brown.

Distributed to the Dean of the College of Liberal Arts, the Executive Vice President and Provost, and the President on October 5, 2000. Copies are available on request from the Office of the General Faculty, FAC 22, F9500. This resolution is posted under "Memorials" at: <http://www.utexas.edu/faculty/council/>.