IN MEMORIAM

GEORGE W. HOFFMAN

George W. Hoffman, longtime distinguished faculty member and lately Professor Emeritus at The University of Texas at Austin, died of heart failure in Washington, D. C.—his post-retirement place of residence—on October 20, 1990, at the age of 76. In his long and productive career, which included 35 years on the faculty of the Department of Geography, he brought distinction both to his discipline and to the University.

Dr. Hoffman, an Austrian, was among the wave of talented Europeans who fled Nazi tyranny and the approaching cataclysm of World War II. The only difference between an immigrant and a refugee is timing. George was a refugee. Tipped off that his name had appeared on an arrest list soon after the German annexation of Austria, he fled on skis to Switzerland and found his way to Britain. Sponsored by Quakers in New Haven, Connecticut, he immigrated to the United States in 1939. Though George experienced all of the insecurities of being a refugee—the imposed adventure, the travails of acceptance, and the necessity of acculturation—he nevertheless was at home here in Austin, since there is no history of Texas, but only a history of Europeans in Texas.

Born George Walter Hoffman to a well-to-do family in Vienna on June 19, 1914—the eve of another great upheaval in his homeland—he once descried his genealogy as "typically Viennese," that is, a mixture of different ethnic elements from central Europe, including Czech, Austrian, Jewish, and Swiss, among others. "Born under the double-eagle" of the Austro-Hungarian dual monarchy, to use his phrase, he never lost many of his European ways, retaining, for example, a thick German accent until his dying day. In his energetic demeanor and astounding work ethic, he seemed perhaps more Prussian than Austrian. His constant buoyancy and enthusiasm, however, were rooted in the banks of the Danube. Outwardly he struck some as gruff and unfeeling, but those who knew him well
saw beneath this exterior appearance a thoughtful, sensitive, and helpful person, though he had little tolerance for underachievers.

Dr. Hoffman completed his secondary education before fleeing Europe and had attended the University of Vienna. After arriving in America, he joined the United States Army and served for three years. His fluency in German and knowledge of central Europe made him a valuable asset in the military, and he was soon sent to intelligence research in the Office of Strategic Services, or O.S.S., the precursor of the Central Intelligence Agency. Hoffman worked for a time with an O.S.S. group stationed in Brindisi on the Adriatic coast of southwestern Italy. That group conducted clandestine operations such as smuggling arms, organizing resistance, gathering intelligence, and undertaking sabotage in south central Europe, especially in the Balkan countries. This wartime work and the personal contacts he made with other geographers in the O.S.S. strongly influenced George for the rest of his professional life.

At the close of the war, when Professor Hoffman returned to college to complete his university degree, he turned quite naturally to those areas he had worked on during the war. His roots in Austria and his wartime work on the countries of southeastern Europe provided a personal and professional background that led him into a lifetime of study, research, and teaching in that region. Hoffman initially pursued such interests at Harvard University, then moved to the University of Michigan for his doctoral work. Ann Arbor in those days had one of the most distinguished geography graduate programs in the country. While at Michigan, George met Donald D. Brand, who was on the faculty there. Brand left Michigan in the spring of 1949 for The University of Texas, hired to establish a Department of Geography. The first faculty member Brand employed was George Hoffman, making him one of the founders of the Department. He joined our faculty in the fall, 1949, and completed his Ph.D. degree at Michigan in the following year.

He at once began building a personal bibliography of publications that would ultimately include eight major books and nearly 150 scholarly articles, in addition to a college-level textbook on European geography that went
through six editions. His productivity was rewarded at the University by promotion to Associate Professor in 1954, after less than five years in rank, and to Professor in 1961.

His major scholarly publications included *Yugoslavia and the New Communism* with Fred Neal (1962), *The Balkans in Transition* (1963), *Regional Development Strategy in Southeast Europe* (1972), and *The Energy Challenge, East and West* with Leslie Dienes (1985). These won him the respect of fellow experts in several of the social sciences and heightened his reputation in Washington circles as a leading expert on the Balkans. In 1985 he was invited to Washington to establish the East European Program at the prestigious Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, a position he held for two years.

As a teacher he brought to the traditionally rather provincial undergraduates of the University his cosmopolitan understanding of the intricacies of Europe that surely placed many in something akin to culture shock. At the very least, he opened their eyes to a foreign world they scarcely knew existed. At times he found their naiveté depressing, and he had little patience with those who clung to their provincialism, but in the end he was irrepressible in the classroom. Graduate students, often provincial in subtler ways, recall perhaps best his repeated emphasis upon the deep German roots of academic geography, and few of them ever forgot this enlightening exposure to their intellectual genealogy. Those among the graduate students who did not learn to read German he found wanting. Encountering Professor Hoffman had the beneficial effect of instructing the graduate student how much he or she still had to learn about geography. We suspect undergraduates experienced a similar enlightenment, as for example when the good Professor launched into a detailed class lecture on the reasons why Serbs and Croats disliked each other—two groups not found in the average student’s universe.

To the chairmanship of the Department of Geography, a position he held from 1978 to 1982, George Hoffman brought an Austro-Hungarian sense of the diplomatic consensus. Any corrosive grievances or desire for revenge would dissipate under his tent of compromise. He struggled to filter out the things that disturbed him, and through compromise tried to minimize the disturbances that infect departments. This was conducted while fully
cognizant that power, authority, and naked self-interest are mysteries not to be grasped in the light of reason.

George always exhibited neutrality and even-handiness in his dealings with faculty.

In civic affairs, he will best be remembered for his tireless work in behalf of the Austin World Affairs Council, a group he founded and directed for 30 years. The city of Austin became a more cosmopolitan place through those efforts.

Over the years, many honors and awards came to George Hoffman, and he was often invited to lecture at other universities on both sides of the Atlantic. Fittingly, the greatest of these honors coincided with his emeritus years. In 1985 George received an Honors Award from the Association of American Geographers, and the following year he received the Jiricek Gold Medal of the Suedosteuropa Society. In 1988 Professor Hoffman was honored three times--with the Grosse Holdene Ehrenzeichen of the Republic of Austria; the Verdienstkreuz, First Class, of the Federal Republic of Germany; and the Merit of the Yugoslav Flag on Necklace, from the government of that now-troubled Balkan country.

Those who knew George recognized that in his personal life he was part of a formidable team. He met his wife Viola Smith while working for the O.S.S. in Washington, D.C. One cannot comment on George Hoffman's academic journey without conceding that much of his success was due to her. Renowned for her sociability, courteousness, and cucumber sandwiches, "Vi" was also George's collaborator. With their collective traveled intelligence, together they created the respected textbook on Europe. Vi balanced George's bounteous energy and unbridled enthusiasm with the calm, demanding eye of a first-rate editor. Her death shortly after his retirement came as a devastating blow. George was for some time disconsolate and lost without her. Friends, places, and situations in Austin continually reminded him of Viola, so the opportunity to go to Washington, D.C., in 1985 gave George a time-consuming job in a different setting that allowed him to manage his grief, although he never succeeded in completely overcoming it. The couple leave two children, Jeanne Pendery of Dallas, Texas, and Michael Hoffman of London, England.
George was a major part of the birth, spirit, and heart of geography of The University of Texas. His passing leaves a gap that is difficult to fill. We remember George as a hard-working, energetic colleague who was an outspoken advocate for the discipline of geography, a diligent opponent of provincialism, a respected scholar, and a friend.

Robert M. Berdahl, President
The University of Texas at Austin

H. Paul Kelley, Secretary
The General Faculty

This Memorial Resolution was prepared by a special committee consisting of Professors Terry G. Jordan (Chair), Robert K. Holz, and Christopher S. Davies.
Selected Bibliography


