IN MEMORIAM

THAD WEED RIKER

Thad Weed Riker was born in Stamford, Conn., November 2, 1880, son of Thaddeus Weed and Louise Draper (Nesbitt) Riker. After graduating from high school in Stamford, and attending Amherst College for two years, he entered Princeton University, took the B.A. there in 1903, became a special fellow in Latin for 1903-1904, and obtained the M.A. in 1904. He then went to Oxford University, whence he received the B. Litt. degree in 1908 and the D. Litt. in 1935. His first appointment, in 1908, was as instructor in English history at Cornell University. That same year he published his first scholarly work, an article on "The Politics behind Braddock's Expedition" in the American Historical Review.

In 1910 Thad Riker was brought to The University of Texas by George P. Garrison, head of the Department of History. Coming at a time when several of the men who were to be his lifelong colleagues bore titles and taught courses that ill-comported with their actual interests--Eugene C. Barker, historian of the Southwest, was adjunct professor of modern European history; Charles W. Ramsdell, student of the South, was instructor in English history; Frederic Duncalf, medievalist, was tutor in ancient history; Charles W. Hackett, future Latin Americanist, was fellow in medieval history--Mr. Riker was fortunate enough to be appointed instructor in his true field, modern European history, and to begin teaching immediately and entirely in that field. In the first University catalogue listing his courses, that of 1910-1911, he offered a survey course on the history of modern continental Europe, an advanced course on the era of the French Revolution and Napoleon, and an advanced course on Europe in the nineteenth century. With the addition in 1913-1914 of a course on the Old Régime and in 1917-1918 of a seminar in modern European history, with various updatings of the nineteenth century course, and with the dropping about 1926-1927 of the survey course, the offerings of his first year closely defined the areas of his more than forty years of teaching. Like most Americans of his generation devoted to European history, Professor Riker was first and foremost a diplomatic historian, and tended to guide his advanced students in that direction. The rivalry of the powers in the Near East was with him a favorite topic of seminar attention.

Mr. Riker was promoted to be adjunct professor in 1913, associate professor in 1917, and professor in 1923. During 1931-1932 he was visiting professor of history at the University of Chicago and at the same time acting editor of the Journal of Modern History, the leading American periodical in that field. Summer teaching took him to the State University of Iowa, Ohio State University, and the University of California at Los Angeles.

In 1923 Professor Riker married Miss Fannie Rhea Preston, then an instructor in Romance Languages at the University. On their wedding trip the Rikers spent two months in London; true historian that he was, Professor Riker put his bride to copying documents in the Public Records Office. The Rikers became the parents of two children, Malcolm Preston Riker, born 1925, and Janet Louise (Riker) Eve, born 1930.

Professor Riker's interests were keen in several non-academic or semi-academic directions. For a time he collected autographs, and for a longer time maintained a devotion to stamps. He served two years as president of the University Faculty Club, esteeming especially its costume dances and the opportunity it afforded to read plays. Matters dramatic were, indeed, his major hobby. A frequent and enthusiastic actor in the Austin Little Theater, he took his family in the summer of 1934 to Martha's Vineyard in order that he

might attend a dramatic school there. In so doing he had in mind, besides the improvement of his acting, the benefits that might accrue to the effectiveness of his classroom teaching. His students of that period can testify that the syllabus of his course in recent European history was organized as a drama in five acts, and that he displayed an extraordinary ability to convey the color and excitement of events.

Travel was with him a principal passion that combined business and pleasure. Altogether he was abroad nine times. On a characteristic trip he went to Paris or to London or to Vienna where his working time might be spent spotting documents to be copied for him in the government archives.

A side of Professor Riker not generally known was his deep love of children. Frequently he took groups of little boys to the circus, and many of the children of former students he remembered at Christmas with post cards or appropriate gifts. This love for children extended abroad, and in his later years he "adopted" an Italian boy orphaned by war. He kept in constant communication with this boy. He hoped, after retirement, to go to Europe for the ostensible purpose of study, but probably his real purpose was to see Roberto, his adopted son. His health broke before he could make the trip, but even so it took all the ingenuity of his family and physician to keep him from attempting it.

Professor Riker was a staunch member of All Saints Episcopal Church, where he was an occasional lay reader, and several times a vestryman. His son Malcolm became, with his blessings, an Episcopal clergyman.

Professor Riker's scholarly reputation, which was international in his particular specialties, rested mainly upon two major books of original research and a number of articles in the best professional journals. His first book, entitled Henry Fox, First Lord Holland: A Study of the Career of an Eighteenth Century Politician, came out in two volumes in 1911. His interests shifted a good deal in the twenty years between this book and his second one, The Making of Modern Roumania: A Study of an International Problem, 1856-1866, which appeared in 1931 and was translated into Roumanian as Cum s'a Infaptuit Romania. Both Henry Fox and The Making of Modern Roumania were published in England by the Oxford University Press. A college textbook by Professor Riker, called A Short History of Modern Europe, and containing nearly nine hundred pages, was brought out by the Macmillan Company in 1935; Alfred A. Knopf published in 1948 a revised version under title A History of Modern Europe. Professor Riker also tried his hand at a public school textbook, The Story of Modern Europe, published by Houghton Mifflin Company in 1942.

Honorary and professional societies to which he belonged included the American Historical Association, the Société d'histoire moderne, the Royal Historical Society, and Phi Beta Kappa. He was a corresponding member of the Academia Romana, Bucharest; a member of the first board of editors of the Texas Review, 1915-1924; a member of the first board of editors of the Journal of Modern History, 1928-1932; and a member of the board of editors of the American Historical Review, 1943-1948.

To his students Professor Riker was an object of admiration for combining liveliness and learning in lectures; of healthy apprehension for enforcing exacting requirements; and of delight for acting as absentminded as they thought a professor should. A former student who took all his courses has said: "Every class period was literally a dramatic presentation. No teacher could have put more of his mental and physical energy into a lecture." In supervising graduate students he was a difficult task master in a sense, but an over-generous one in giving his time and advice. His devotion to modern European history is perpetuated in the colleges of the Southwest by the people he trained, such as J. A. Rickard of Texas A. & I.; Frank Gafford of North Texas State College; Ima Barlow of West Texas College; James Taylor of Southwest Texas State Teachers College; Preston Williams of Lamar College; and John R. Hubbard of Tulane. To his colleagues Professor Riker's most memorable single trait was a lifelong and inflexible insistence upon high standards rigorously maintained. It was in this insistence that he made probably his greatest contribution to the Department of History, to The University of Texas, and to higher education in the Southwest.

Professor Riker retired from the University at the end of the summer of 1951 and died February 17, 1952.

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