IN MEMORIAM

RUDOLPH WILLARD
(29 July 1892 to 28 September 1979)

Rudolph Willard was born in Sofia, Bulgaria on the 29th of July 1892 and died on the 28th of September 1979 in Austin, Texas. His father, Nicolai Radouloff, a Civil Engineer, had met Elenka Marguerita Markova in Sofia, where she taught at a missionary school. Elenka had fled from her home in Macedonia, riding over the mountains at night to Sofia, to avoid an arranged marriage to a rich peasant, much older than she. She preserved the horse-blanket she had used on the flight, and the children brought it with them when they came to the United States.

Elenka Radoulova died of tuberculosis about 1900 and her husband married again. Elenka’s children, Nicolai and Marguerita, were adopted by an American missionary who had come to know the family through the missionary school where Elenka taught. The missionary, Margaret Bradford Willard, was the widow of Captain Robert Willard, who had been killed at Antietam in 1862. She gave the boy the name Rudolph and his sister her own name. They lived in the family home of the Willards in Madison, Connecticut, a small town on the Sound about twenty miles from New Haven.

Rudolph spent his freshman year in Oberlin College, 1909-1910, but during 1910 Mrs. Willard died and he did not return. She had supported the children on a pension of $45 a month and what she earned by making and selling hats at her home. Hats were elaborate and essential in those days, and though the work on each was extensive, the addition to the family resources was important for the three dependent on it. Rudolph’s sister was able to graduate from Wellesley, doubtless helped by her brother. She, too, had worked as a waitress and at other employment. Rudolph, in the summer before attending Oberlin, had worked as a waiter in a summer hotel, then in 1911-1912 he sold stereoscopic views, and the next year Wearever utensils. From 1913 to 1915 he was Superintendent of public schools and sole teacher in a one-room school in Cold Spring, Texas. There he learned that teaching was his vocation. On his savings from a salary of $60 a month he entered Yale, but his studies were
interrupted during the First World War when he volunteered for the Yale Mobile Hospital Unit, which was sent overseas almost at once. He served from 1917 to 1919, but the unit seemed to be forgotten at the end of the war. While he waited for transportation, visiting old churches and taking quantities of photographs in the south of France, he first developed his interest in the middle ages.

Rudolph, after his return from France, completed his work at Yale, getting his bachelor's degree in 1919 and his doctorate in 1925. Margaret graduated from Wellesley in 1923, and then taught Latin for twenty-five years at Kent School, a private school for girls. About 1939 she married Arthur McCartney Shepard, a historian and an accountant for the Internal Revenue Service. Arthur and Margaret were devout Episcopalians, and her niece describes her as almost fanatically religious. But the church was important to all of them, and all became Episcopalians, although Rudolph and Margaret had originally belonged to the Congregational Church. Margaret died in 1964 and was buried in Madison, Connecticut.

At Wellesley Margaret had a quiet roommate, who had come from an Episcopal convent school in New York City. One vacation in their senior year, Margaret brought her roommate, Nedaleine Rose, home to Madison. There Rudolph met her, and after she graduated with Honors, they were married in 1923. Rudolph was then an instructor at Yale, where he remained teaching until 1936. Nedaleine shared the deep religious feelings of the Willards, more in the spirit of cenobite than of missionary. In 1936 Rudolph accepted a visiting lectureship at Wellesley College and in 1937 he came to The University of Texas as a professor. He had a Sterling Research Fellowship at Yale in 1931-1932 and a research grant in 1946-1947, when he spent a summer at Columbia. He had other research grants in 1951-1952 and 1962-1963. He was visiting professor at Columbia University in 1955-1956, and later in several summer sessions.

Dr. Willard was a member of the Lincolnshire Architectural Committee, the Linguistic Society of America, the International Association of University Professors of English, the Modern Humanities Research Association, the South Central Modern Language Association, and the Cambridge Bibliographical Society.
He is survived by his wife Nedaleine and four daughters: Mary Hartay of Austin, Margaret Lee of Sacramento, Nedda of Austin, and Katherine Elenka Willard/Clark of Los Angeles, besides three grandchildren.

The bare facts of Dr. Willard’s life give little indication of the spirit of the man. Because of his modesty, his eminence as a scholar could be best realized when visitors like Bertram Colgrave of Durham University or C. L. Wrenn of Oxford came to campus, and one could see the respect that the world of scholars accorded the man and his work. The Argentinian writer, Jorge Luis Borges, attended his seminar on Anglo-Saxon literature when he spent the Fall Semester in Austin 1961-1962. From the information received in that seminar, Borges corrected his earlier book on Ancient Germanic Literatures (1951).

Quite another interest Willard shared with Bagby Atwood and John Henry Faulk. The three had visited a number of small churches, many with black preachers, and had made tapes of the sermons. Willard had especially liked the richness of expression and the depth of feeling. Language, dialects, and folklore were three fields of interest secondary only to his principal concern, the Middle Ages. To some an edition of the Blickling Homilies might seem a dry and un-rewarding task, but there he found the humanity revealed in the marginalia, especially rich in the surviving manuscript. Even after retirement his work did not end, for he recorded the whole of Beowulf, carefully redoing it until he was satisfied. He talked enthusiastically of the insight this total reading gave him into the cadences and melodies, constantly varying with each half line of the Old English poem. (These tape recordings are part of the collection of the English Department of the University.)

As a man he was consistently kind and generous, talking little of himself, delighting rather in ideas and never in a spirit of challenge, but always in enthusiasm for learning. He was deeply religious without being sanctimonious or self-righteous, and generous alike to colleagues, students, and all who were close to him. He would be pleased with and is most deserving of the final tribute to Beowulf that concludes the poem he called the equal of Paradise Lost. The last half line, usually translated "most eager for praise" is more fitting for a warrior than for a professor, but the force is wishing to be worthy of praise, and that ambition does honor to anyone and is most appropriate for Rudolph Willard.
Manna mildust ond monowarust,
loodum lifost ond lofgeornost.

Kindest of men and most humane, most considerate of his people and most wishful for a good name.

Ruth Lehmann, chairman
Daniel McKeithan
Ernest Mossner

The following are a few statements by students or colleagues, many of them both. They are arranged roughly according to the probable date of the first association.

Willard was a man of unusual warmth and kindness, totally free from the petty jealousies and squabbles which all too often mar scholarly calm. It was typical of him that once, in conversation with a distinguished Yale professor, I learned that Rudolph had been deeply helpful to more than one of his colleagues in personal crises. It was a further pleasure to find that Medievalists as far away as Sweden remembered and respected his years of work in the editing of Old English manuscripts. Finally for me, a really satisfying pleasure was to have been instrumental in completing a Festschrift in his honor, a gift richly deserved by a quiet, unassuming, and learned scholar.

--Archibald Hill

Rudolph Willard first introduced me to Chaucer in Sophomore English at Yale. He showed, then as later, an infectious enthusiasm for medieval literature and life. His contribution to the UT scene was not only literary and scholarly. He helped bring a still somewhat provincial English department and University in closer contact with the civilized world.

--Oscar Maurer

Rudolph, with his charming and easy-going manner, drew people to him, both in social and academic circles. Yet he seemed never to wish to be a political force on the campus or in the city. His mild influence was, nevertheless, pervasive. He played his cards well in councils and committees.
But even as an adversary he was still so reasonable and pleasant that he seldom generated hard feelings or enmity. He passed so quietly among us that many, probably, never savored fully the breadth and depth of his learning, the fine humanity of his character. My own feeling is one of regret that, though I came to know him well, I did not seek to know him better. He had much to share, much to give.

--M. M. Crow

Wide-ranging knowledge and ebullient enthusiasm about literature and the Middle Ages characterized Rudolph Willard and impressed his students, not only graduates but sophomores. The illustration sharpest in my memory is an unpublished paper I heard him read, a sideline to his scholarly work on earlier centuries, about Malory (late fifteenth century, and my own specialty). Rudolph took the superficially conventional episode of Lancelot du Lac becoming a priest-hermit when his fighting days were over; illuminated and transformed it by drawing connections with the literary traditions of saints' lives.

--Robert Wilson

Two memories of Rudolph stand out: the first a Saturday evening years ago when Rudolph had just about everybody in the department over to the old Faculty Club on San Antonio Street for an evening of Gilbert and Sullivan. He played a slew of records, most or all his own as I recall. Naturally, he didn't just sit but buzzed and flapped about in high Rudolphian fashion. The second was the occasion of his asking me, most likely in 1944 or 1945, about the naval VI2 program in English I was directing and teaching in. He said he'd volunteered to teach the same group calculus. When I expressed amazement--I stopped with algebra myself--he said, still flapping, "Oh, Leo, Calculus is sheer poetry! I love it."

--Leo Hughes

Rudolph was the kind of teacher-friend one dreams about. He opened my eyes to the extent of my ignorance without making me feel I was a dunce. He read my dissertation when his eyes made reading a great discomfort. He got me the offer of a job at Yale. His house was open to me and to other
students, and some of us were tolerated at the Tuesday Evening Club. In all the years I knew him, I never knew him to say or do a single unkind thing.

--James Sledd

Dr. Peter T. Flawn, President
The University of Texas at Austin

Bill D. Francis, Secretary
The General Faculty

This memorial resolution was prepared by a special committee consisting of professors Ruth Lehmann (chairman), Daniel McKeithan, Ernest Mossner.