IN MEMORIAM

J. HARRY BENNETT

J. Harry Bennett, who died in Austin, Texas, on April 25, 1966, was born at Oelwein in northeastern Iowa on September 29, 1919. He grew up in California, graduating from Compton Union High School in June 1937 and from Compton College (J. C.) with an A.A. degree two years later. He then entered the University of California at Los Angeles, whence he received an A.B. with highest honors in June 1941, an A.M. "with distinction" in October 1943, and a Ph.D. in history on September 11, 1948. He was elected to Phi Beta Kappa, and was for two years a university fellow. He had taught history and English at Willowbrook High School in Compton, 1942-1945, attended briefly the United States Navy's Japanese language school at Boulder, Colorado, and served as teaching assistant in English history at U.C.L.A. He came to the University of Texas as an assistant professor the same month that he took his Ph.D. He was promoted associate professor in 1952, and professor in 1961. He was visiting professor at Rice University in 1962-1963. As a Ford Foundation Fellow he was able to spend a year in England in 1953-1954, and grants from the American Philosophical Society and the University Research Institute permitted him to return for several months in 1960. While there he gained the friendship and respect of leading scholars in his field. Professor Bennett was a member of various learned bodies, those most germane to his interests being the Barbados Historical Society, the Conference on British Studies, and the American Historical Association.

Professor Bennett's work with F. J. Klingberg at U.C.L.A. made the society and economy of the British West Indies the first object of his research, and his writing focused on it to the end. Much of his publication related to slavery on the Codrington Plantations of Barbados in the eighteenth century. Subsequently he uncovered materials on the beginnings of British sugar planting in Jamaica, deriving from them several articles that looked toward a book on "Seventeenth Century Plantations in the British Caribbean." Professor Bennett's fresh information--and nearly everything he wrote was wholly fresh-came in the main from highly intractable manuscript
materials that required great labor in transcription and even greater labor in analysis. Partly on this account, and partly because he demanded of himself succinctness, exactitude, clarity, and ease in exposition, the extent of his writing was moderate in proportion to the thousands of hours that he worked.

Related to his principal research interest was a secondary attention to the position of the Anglican Church in the British Empire, more especially the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of the Bishop of London. He directed several students into aspects of this subject, spent considerable time in the episcopal records at Lambeth Palace, and published one paper on the elusive question of the basis of the bishop's jurisdiction.

Another research interest, one that might have become predominant had he lived, was eighteenth century British history, especially politics in the age of Walpole and Pelham. Because this was the area upon which his reading and advanced teaching centered, and because it was obviously in the mainstream of British history, which was hardly true of the West Indies, he often felt that he ought to extricate himself from the Indies and devote himself to Britain in the eighteenth century. Much of his time in England was spent in relevant manuscript collections at the British Museum and elsewhere. He accumulated a mass of notes, and in 1965 even agreed to do a book on politics in the reign of Anne, but his actual writing continued to be about the West Indies.

Coming into a Department where English history was already strongly established, Professor Bennett was able from the beginning to teach entirely in his chosen field. As an undergraduate teacher he was clear, courteous, helpful, and sufficiently systematic, a combination that insured his being effective and well liked; at the same time he was too visibly detached, bookish, and lacking the common touch to be a decided favorite. It was with graduate students that he enjoyed his great success as a teacher. His seminars at the top of his form were masterly displays of erudition, whether bibliographical, factual, or interpretative, and were brought off without notes. They attracted large numbers of graduate students, so many that the programs of most doctoral candidates in history (and a goodly number in English) could be expected to include one or more of
the fields he taught. This meant that he sat on nearly all the qualifying examinations for doctoral candidates in history, a taxing role in which he displayed admirable discernment. Since he was also for several years graduate adviser in history, and often the personal as well as the official friend of those he taught or advised, he possessed an unrivalled familiarity with the graduate students of the department. To speak of him as "the graduate students' professor" was true in more ways than one.

As befitted a learned man thoroughly committed to books, Professor Bennett devoted much attention and not a little money to assembling a professional library. Though not spectacular in size--the core ran around 1,000 volumes, most of them weighty--it was a fine reading and reference collection for the scholar and teacher. He was liberal to a fault in sharing its use; indeed, his students would have had difficulty in getting along without it. In perpetuation of this openhandedness, he bequeathed his books to the Library of the University of Texas, where they are a boon to students and readers in the fields of his particular interest.

Visitors to Professor Bennett's bachelor quarters were met with a quick smile and a hospitality that became proverbial. He was certain to insist before long upon taking them out to dinner, a form of social activity that was his particular delight. The accompanying conversation, whether academic, political, or personal, was on his part always informed and intelligent, often witty, sometimes wry; his favorite themes had to do with the structure and operation of the societies he knew or studied, not forgetting the academic community in which he lived. To his friends and associates his generosity was as munificent as his hospitality; if one sought a favor, his response was to do more than had been asked. Sociable as he was, however, his bent was not toward putting himself forward as a person nor toward cultivating a large circle of acquaintance. More characteristic was the formation over the years of a limited number of close friendships maintained with unflagging loyalty and warmth as long as he lived.

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