REPORT OF THE SPECIAL JOHANNES LASSEN BOYSEN MEMORIAL RESOLUTION COMMITTEE

The Special Committee of the General Faculty on the preparation of the Johannes Lassen Boysen Memorial Resolution has filed with the Secretary of the General Faculty the following report.

Eugene W. Nelson, Secretary
The General Faculty

IN MEMORIAM

JOHANNES LASSEN BOYSEN

Johannes Lassen Boysen, the son of Hans Boysen and Mathilda Lassen, was born February 20, 1871 at Loit-Kirkeby, North Schleswig, now Danish territory, formerly Prussian. He died in Austin, Texas on January 20th, 1939. He graduated from the Volksschule of his birthplace in 1886 and in the same year emigrated to this country. Living with relatives, he attended Northwestern Preparatory School in Minneapolis. There, in 1895, evidently well prepared, he entered Harvard College, winning the Detur Prize in History and graduating in 1898 magna cum laude, Phi Beta Kappa and with honorable mention in German and French. Taking courses with scholars like Grandgent, von Jagdhaus, Kuno Francke no doubt stimulated his interest in modern languages as a field of study - as perhaps did also his early experience in his home land of the bitter antagonisms that a difference of language may arouse in peoples of the same race and religion, and the necessity of better understanding.

Wishing to stand on his own feet, the young man accepted a position as Teacher of Ancient and Modern Languages (and practically everything else except science) at the Protestant Episcopal Academy in Philadelphia. Apparently, the youngsters there were not too unruly to make life miserable for the gentle scholar, for he remained in the same position till 1902 when he became Instructor in German at Syracuse University. Thus reasonably assured of an academic career he sought out as lifemate his cousin, Catharina Boysen, with whom he lived in a happy marriage until her death in 1948. A daughter, Helen Ingeborg, survives him.

Continuing in his chosen line of German, he obtained the Master's Degree at Syracuse in 1904 and, on being granted leave, attended the University of Leipzig in 1907, then settled down to work in the University of Würzburg from 1907 to 1909, achieving his Ph.D. with a dissertation, directed by Brenner, Über den Gebrauch des Genitivus in den Epen Wolframs von Ercbenoch (Leipzig 1910). Sitting at the feet of giants of philology like Sievers, Hoff, Brugmann, and listening to lecturers like Witkowski and Köster must have been of decisive influence on the standards he set on his own studies.

Returning to his post at Syracuse he quickly advanced to a full professorship of Germanic Languages (1913), but was abruptly dismissed by Chancellor Day when he dared to oppose academic dictatorship in connection with the appointment of a man for a position in his Department who in his judgment was not qualified for it. It would have been a strong case for the Association of American University Professors - as yet non-existent - to have demonstrated its salutary influence!

Nothing daunted, Boysen filled a temporary position as Instructor in German at State College, Pennsylvania; but was soon (1914) attracted to Austin, where, under the brilliant leadership of Eduard Prokosch, a promising Department of Germanic Languages and Comparative Philology was being built up. But again it was fate to be interrupted - this time by the First World War, when through most egregious folly under the guise of patriotism, not only here but all over the country, departments teaching the language of our then enemy were being liquidated. Later, in the early twenties, when sanity was restored, Boysen, who had filled in meanwhile teaching French, was entrusted with the building up again of the Department of Germanic Languages. It fell to him chiefly to teach the advanced and graduate courses in the fields which he had made particularly his own, viz. Gothic, the history of the German language, advanced German grammar and syntax. Dr. Boysen never gave himself to frequent publication, but in 1917 he produced a carefully edited German version of Henrik Døsen's An Enemy of the People in the Oxford German Series.

Boysen was a man of retiring disposition, shunning, whenever possible, administrative work; but he gave unostentatiously of himself to such duties as were assigned to him in committees and to the chairmanship of the Department...
(1920-1929). He was especially valuable in the guidance of graduate students, frequently serving on dissertation committees not only in German but also in the English and other departments. That he was not afraid to stand up for what he considered right was shown not only in his brush with Chancellor Day but also by his vigorous protest when a man judged by him to be ill-prepared was brought into the Department against the wishes of its members. In his classes Boysen insisted with gentle urgency on exact and thorough work. His standards were high. As a teacher, his quiet dignity, fairness, lack of all showmanship are gratefully remembered by thousands of students now scattered throughout the length and breadth of this country.

Charles Paul Boner  
Robert Adger Law  
Harry J. Leon  
Lee M. Hollander, Chairman

Filed with the Secretary of the General Faculty by Dr. Lee M. Hollander, Chairman of the Special J. L. Boysen Memorial Resolution Committee, June 5, 1959.

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