

# Herbert Anthony Kellar, 1887-1955

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THE news that Herbert Anthony Kellar had died suddenly of a heart attack on October 8, 1955, the day before the opening of the Nashville meeting of the Society of American Archivists, came as a great shock. He was one of the founders of the Society, its vice president in 1941, a member of its council from 1941 to 1946, and a member of many of its committees.

He was born at Hooper, Nebraska, on February 21, 1887. After receiving his bachelor's degree at the University of Chicago in 1909, he did graduate work at Leland Stanford University and the University of Wisconsin and taught at the State universities of Texas and Minnesota. In 1915 he became the first curator of the personal and business papers of Cyrus Hall McCormick. His life work was the building of the McCormick collection into the largest and finest collection on American agricultural history. The McCormick Historical Association of Chicago was chartered in 1931 to further this work, and he was named as its director. In 1951, when the McCormick heirs presented the collection to the Wisconsin State Historical Society, he moved to Madison; and he spent the remaining years in coordinating the society's agricultural materials with those of the McCormick collection. He is survived by his wife, the former Lucile O'Connor; his daughter Alecea, a student at the University of Wisconsin; and his sister, Mrs. Henry Grimes of Bartow, Florida.

The McCormick Historical Collection is not only one of the outstanding manuscript collections of the country, but Herbert Kellar was one of the half dozen greatest collectors of Americana. The tales, often fantastic, of how he charmed documents out of the attics of patrician mansions and humble farm houses would have made a fascinating volume, a book which he refused to write as being in bad taste. Unlike his colleagues, he always seemed to arrive before the match was struck to the bonfires of family papers. Surprisingly, his collecting activities in the areas covered by other historical agencies never seemed to create jealousy. "Herbert was saving manuscripts from destruction and educating Virginians to the im-

portance of preserving their family papers at a time when we had neither financial resources nor support for collecting. He paved the way for us." This was the generous statement of the head of one of the Virginia historical institutions.

Before the organization of the McCormick Historical Collection no industry had taken steps to preserve its archives and to make them available to historians. All later developments in the field of business archives have been strongly influenced and inspired by Herbert Kellar's pioneer work. The restoration of the McCormick farmstead near Lexington, Virginia, which occupied much of his time for several years during the 1930's, is an example of his ability to make practical application of scholarly research, and it was perhaps the project he most enjoyed.

No one gave more unstintingly or efficiently to committee and other work of professional organizations than Herbert Kellar, and his activities were by no means limited to his services to the Society of American Archivists. He was a past president of the Mississippi Valley Historical Association and the Agricultural History Society and served as a member of their editorial boards and in other capacities. He was also active in the American Historical Association and the American Association for State and Local History and several other learned societies. He was president of the Madison Civil War Round Table at the time of his death. He was also at one time chairman of the Chicago Metropolitan Library Council.

In the past 20 years he acted as chairman of some of the most influential committees in his professional field, notably the National Advisory Committee for the Historical Records Survey of WPA; the American Historical Association's Committee on Historical Source Materials; and the Library of Congress' Committee on Cooperation Among Research Libraries. He was active in promoting the American Imprints Survey, the Union Catalog of Manuscripts, and the applications of microphotography and microprint to library and archival problems.

Most of his literary output took the form of committee reports and articles in professional journals. He edited volumes 21 and 22 of the Indiana Historical Collections, *Solon Robinson, Pioneer and Agriculturalist*, and had practically completed a biography of McCormick. An irreparable loss to scholarship is the history of American agriculture, which he had planned as his next work and for the writing of which he had been preparing himself for 35 years.

Herbert Kellar had a genius for friendship. His personal life brought him both tragedy and happiness and taught him to become

the most genial, tolerant, understanding, and unselfish of friends. He was always ready and eager to give himself, whether for casual social intercourse or for hard work on professional problems. One's own tensions relaxed with him, because one felt the strength that comes from those rare men who, like him, are at peace with themselves. Although teaching did not appeal to him, he was especially interested in and helpful to younger men in the profession. Many a newly created Ph.D., shyly attending his first archival or historical conference, found himself meeting important men who could be helpful to him, being invited to join congenial groups, and in general being made to feel that he belonged. So unobtrusively was this done that the young man often failed to realize that he owed these things to Herbert Kellar. In speaking of a young protégé who had disappointed our hopes of a brilliant career, he remarked, "So and so has the ability, but he is not willing to pay the price of success." That willingness to pay the price of success was the keynote of Herbert Kellar's life. His passing has left a gap in the lives of all his friends that cannot be filled.