

# John Franklin Jameson

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WE HAVE met this afternoon to recognize in tangible form the leadership of John Franklin Jameson in bringing about the creation of the National Archives establishment and the construction of this impressive building. The token of this recognition is in the form of a bronze plaque which describes Jameson in simple terms as "author, editor, teacher." It is appropriate that this brief address should recall these essential phases of his life and career.

## YOUTH AND EDUCATION

He was born in Somerville, Massachusetts, on the edge of Boston, in September 1859. His father, John Jameson, was then, and for most of his son's boyhood, a successful and respected schoolmaster. His immigrant ancestor, Thomas Jameson, of Scottish origins, came to New England from Coleraine, on the north Irish coast, in the middle of the seventeenth century. His mother, Mariette Thompson, traced her maternal line through generations of Woburn, Massachusetts, families to Capt. Edward Johnson, author of *The Wonder Working Providence of Sion's Saviour in New England*. From both paternal and maternal lines young Frank, for that was the name by which he was known, derived an absorbing interest in history and the precious endowment of an extraordinary memory, an orderly mind, and unusual powers of application. He also had a keen sense of literary form, an ability to express his thoughts in clear and attractive prose, and often in verse, and an impeccable orthography. As a diarist he kept journals of a voyage to the Barbadoes in sailing vessels at the age of 7; of a summer vacation off the Maine coast when he was 13; of his first job, in a Woburn store, at 15; and a very detailed diary for the years 1878-1890.

He prepared for Harvard at the Roxbury Latin School, where

<sup>1</sup> This paper was read at the National Archives on December 28, 1955, on the occasion of the presentation by the American Historical Association to the National Archives of a bronze plaque of Dr. Jameson, which had been commissioned for his former friends and colleagues.

masters W. C. Collar and M. G. Daniell saw to it that he had a solid and enduring foundation in the classics, and where he also distinguished himself in mathematics. He was admitted to Harvard in June 1874 before he was 15, but spent a year between school and college. For the first part of this year he was with an aunt in Stockbridge, Massachusetts, who had married a physician, for whom he worked in the garden, drove the horse, and did odd chores. The second part of the year he spent in Woburn with his grandfather Thompson and had a job as errand boy, cleaner, and man of all work in a small store at \$3.00 per week. In such spare time as he had between errands, cleaning, and "tending" the counter he reviewed his Latin and Greek, following a self-imposed plan, and read Thackeray, Scott, Bulwer-Lytton, and Hawthorne. He also wound the clocks of the Orthodox and Unitarian churches, played the flute, for which he made special arrangements of music, and worked out the genealogies of two maternal lines, conducting necessary research in the cemeteries and the town records as well as in published sources.

Just when he was making final arrangements to enter Harvard his father, no longer a schoolmaster but a lawyer, decided to remove the family to Amherst; and Frank, "much against my will," as he confided to his diary, gave up Harvard for Amherst College. Here he joined Psi Upsilon, won many prizes, took all the advanced mathematics offered by Professor Elihu Root, gave special attention to history and the classics, and studied modern languages, especially German, in which he became exceedingly proficient. He graduated first in his class in 1879 and, as valedictorian at commencement, delivered an oration on "Bhudda."

Unable to raise funds for the study of history in Germany, where he thought he would like to spend from 3 to 5 years, he taught classics and history in the Worcester, Massachusetts, High School for a year, and then, in 1880, at the suggestion of Herbert B. Adams, entered the recently founded Johns Hopkins University as a candidate for the degree of Ph.D. This degree, which he received in 1882, was the first doctorate in history conferred by the university.

He remained at Johns Hopkins until 1888, serving as assistant and associate, teaching, lecturing, and writing. He had already decided to devote himself to American history which, until he had gone to Johns Hopkins, had not greatly interested him; but he retained an impressive knowledge of classical and European history and saw American history in its world setting.

It was during the Hopkins years that Jameson became acquainted with the records and historical collections of the Government in Washington and acquired that concern for their preservation and use in research that underlay his campaign for the National Archives.

### TEACHER

Although Jameson's career as a teacher at the college level began during the Johns Hopkins years, it came into flower at Brown University, where he was professor of history and head of the department from 1888 to 1901.

At once he organized a "Seminary," on the Hopkins model, for graduate students, which had a small but enthusiastic attendance. Several of his students achieved distinction — for example, Mary E. Wooley, later president of Mount Holyoke; Harold D. Hazeltine, who became Downing professor of the History of the Laws of England, in Cambridge University; and Edmund C. Burnett, whose massive collection of *Letters of Members of the Continental Congress* is a monument of American historical editing. Jameson's undergraduate courses were reputed to be exceedingly difficult, and he rather discouraged their election except by students of known ability and determination. One such was Carl Russell Fish, whose brilliant career at Wisconsin was prematurely cut short. Another student, a noted athlete, refused to be discouraged — and became an object of Jameson's pride and affection. This student was Charles McCarthy, originator of legislative reference service and author of *The Wisconsin Idea*.

Jameson's lectures and class discussions were inspiring and his generalizations and obiter dicta were memorable. His kindliness and warmth of heart, as well as his humor, were a surprise to undergraduates who had judged him by the habitual sternness of his expression. He was not a "popular" professor, but no professor at Brown in the nineties was more respected and admired, and those who really knew him held "Jamie" in warm affection.

At the University of Chicago his tenure of 4 years, 1901-5, was too brief for the formation of a "school," but his graduate students appreciated his great learning, marveled at his memory and accuracy, found inspiration in his guidance, and were devoted to him for life.

On the occasion of his fiftieth birthday in September 1909, he received a letter signed by 75 of his former students expressing their appreciation and gratitude. They also joined to present him

with a fine hall clock of beautiful design. In his reply he said, "You have increased the happiness with which I always think of the best of those whom I have taught, and have made my whole life seem to me better worth while." Of the clock he said "[It is] so handsome . . . that I ought to have the hall re-papered and get a new suit of clothes."

#### EDITOR

Little Frank Jameson started upon a career as editor at the age of 10, when he issued *Jameson's New Monthly Magazine* (Vol. 1, No. 1), printed in pencil and containing historical articles and domestic and foreign news. A year later he brought out *The Puzzler*, devoted to anagrams, double acrostics, enigmas, rebuses, and riddles. Jameson's first vacation from Johns Hopkins was devoted to editing the *Records of the Town of Amherst, 1735-1788*, which were printed by the local newspaper, *The Amherst Record*, 1883-84. He edited numerous documents for the *Annual Reports* of the American Historical Association, the most considerable collection being the *Correspondence of John C. Calhoun* in some 1,200 pages. He was also general editor of *Original Narratives of Early American History*, sponsored but not published by the American Historical Association.

But his greatest task was the editing of the *American Historical Review* from its foundation in 1895 to 1901 and again from 1905 to 1928, and it was in the distinguished performance of this labor that his reputation as one of the greatest of learned editors was achieved. I recall that in Paris, in 1909, Gabriel Monod, editor of the *Révue Historique*, said to me that he considered the *American Historical Review* the best of all historical journals. Jameson possessed extraordinary gifts as an editor — an exact and comprehensive memory, instinctive attention to details, even the most minute, and the ability to work rapidly and surely. He made the *Review* representative of the best American scholarship, catholic in content, critical in its appraisals, constructive in suggestions, interesting and dependable as a medium of professional news.

#### AUTHOR

As an author Jameson's output was remarkable for diversity and volume and was notable for its uniformly high literary quality. A complete bibliography of his writings, as well as the publication in collected form of the most representative and significant of them, are desiderata of high priority in the field of American historiog-

raphy. It would be most appropriate to accomplish these tasks in observance of his centenary in 1959, only 4 years hence.

Of Jameson's ability to produce a magnum opus there can be no question. During his Hopkins days he planned such a work and confided his hopes to his diary. The work was to be a "Constitutional and Political History of the States of the Union," and he went so far as to publish *An Introduction to the Study of the Constitutional and Political History of the States*.<sup>2</sup>

His monograph, *William Usselinx, Founder of the Dutch and Swedish West India Companies*,<sup>3</sup> written during the Hopkins period, is a model of research and critical appraisal of the sources, mostly in Dutch or Swedish, which languages Jameson learned to read fluently. The purpose of this work was to bring out the importance of the commercial organizations in the home countries which were behind the more spectacular operations of discovery, exploration, and colonization.

In his years at Brown, Jameson published his *History of Historical Writing in America* (Houghton Mifflin, 1896) and wrote the lectures which were later published under the title *The American Revolution Considered as a Social Movement* (Princeton University Press, 1926), a small book and perhaps the best known of his works.

But most of his writings were in the smaller forms — articles, addresses, lectures. Many of these were written for a purpose, as evidenced by their titles — for example: "The Expenditures of Foreign Governments in Behalf of History," "Gaps in the Published Records of United States History," "The Functions of State and Local Historical Societies With Respect to Research and Publications," and "The American Acta Sanctorum," a plea for the study of American church and religious history.<sup>4</sup> One of the finest of his articles is an address before the trustees of the Carnegie Institution of Washington in 1912 on "The Future Uses of History" — an eloquent and moving statement of the value of historical research for the making of wise decisions in the conduct of human affairs.<sup>5</sup>

Jameson was one of the most prolific of letter writers, especially

<sup>2</sup> Johns Hopkins University *Studies in History and Political Science*, 4th series, vol. 5, 1886.

<sup>3</sup> New York and London, 1887; also in American Historical Association, *Papers*, vol. 2, no. 3, p. 149-382 (1887).

<sup>4</sup> American Historical Association, *Annual Report*, 1891, p. 31-61; *American Historical Review*, 11: 817-831 (July 1906); American Historical Association, *Annual Report*, 1898, p. 51-59; *American Historical Review*, 13: 286-302 (Jan. 1908).

<sup>5</sup> *History Teachers Magazine*, Feb. 1913.

during his years in Washington, from 1905, when he was engaged in setting on foot useful enterprises of historical exploration, research, and publication. It is most fortunate that — thanks to the devoted labors of two who are no longer with us, Leo F. Stock and Elizabeth Donnan, and also to those of John Riggs, who has completed their task — there will shortly be published by the American Philosophical Society a collection of some 500 of Jameson's letters carefully selected and abundantly edited.<sup>6</sup> These will constitute a truly monumental contribution to the history of American historical studies.

#### CAMPAIGNER FOR THE ARCHIVES

And now we come to the concluding part of this address, that which bears most closely upon the purpose of this gathering — Jameson's campaign for the National Archives.

When in 1905 Jameson came from Chicago to Washington, where he was to spend the remainder of his life, it was to carry out, as director of the Department of Historical Research in the Carnegie Institution of Washington, a broad and far sighted program<sup>7</sup> which he himself had drawn up 3 years earlier, and on which a substantial beginning had been made by Andrew C. McLaughlin, who for 2 years had served as organizing director of the department. Underlying the program was a fixed determination to do everything possible to assure the preservation, organization, effective administration, and use of the records of the Federal Government.

The story of the campaign which Jameson directed for more than a quarter of a century has been well told by Fred Shelley in his article "The Interest of J. Franklin Jameson in the National Archives," which deserves to be read by all who have any interest in American history.<sup>8</sup>

I shall not attempt to retell that story on this occasion, but I will try to review what I believe to have been the chief factors in the success of Jameson's leadership.

He sought and received the support of many influential groups, such as the national associations of scholars; the regional, State, and local historical societies, and the patriotic and veterans' organizations.

He inspired editorial comment in newspapers and special articles in periodicals and thus helped to inform and interest public opinion.

<sup>6</sup> *An Historian's World; Selections From the Correspondence of John Franklin Jameson* (Philadelphia, 1956); reviewed elsewhere in this issue.

<sup>7</sup> Carnegie Institution of Washington, *Yearbook*, No. 1.

<sup>8</sup> *American Archivist*, 12: 99-130 (April 1949).

He sought the support of officers of the Government, including successive Presidents of the United States, and assured a favorable attitude on the part of the executive branch.

He repeatedly met with key members of both Houses of Congress (none of whom were hostile but few of whom saw any personal advantage in espousing a cause which, though worthy of support, had slight vote appeal), and he laid before them realistic, factual, and persuasive statements. Thus he found influential champions on Capitol Hill.

But a chief factor in Jameson's success was his own personal character, his total absence of self-seeking, his reputation and prestige as a scholar, and his patient and tactful persistence.

And so it came to pass that he lived to see the realization of his long effort: the creation of the National Archives establishment on the basis of legislation which he himself had drafted, the erection of this building, the appointment of a scholar of great proven ability to be the first Archivist of the United States, and the organization of a professional staff of high competence and purpose.

The last paragraph of Mr. Shelley's article is so apposite to this occasion — indeed so prophetic of it that I quote from it in concluding this address:

Curiously enough, when inscriptions and subjects for paintings [for the National Archives Building] were being selected . . . no consideration seems to have been given to the men who interested themselves . . . in the preservation of American archives . . . [These] . . . had no chance against military and political figures. . . . But one day, perhaps, this imbalance can be righted. Possibly there may be a time when a token of our indebtedness to earlier persons interested in archives will be found in the building at Seventh and Pennsylvania. If that time ever comes, the largest token must be for the person to whom, more than to any other single individual, we are indebted for the perseverance, patience, and persistence which got us the beginning from which has been developed the National Archives — J. Franklin Jameson.

Happily that time is now here.