

# Roscoe R. Hill, 1880-1960

By MARTIN P. CLAUSSEN

Alexandria, Virginia

THE DEATH of Roscoe R. Hill on October 26, 1960, at his home in Washington, D. C., ended a long and productive career, both in and out of the archival field, that covered almost half a century in academic and public service.

For the Society of American Archivists Dr. Hill's passing is a special loss—the loss of one of our founding members (among the oldest of those surviving) and of one who was active in the Society up to within hours of his death, when he was working on the latest installment of his "Latin American Archivology" series. Almost every year our quarterly had at least some word from him, usually a note of praise for a new Latin American archival guide or documentary historical publication or a gentle but persistent gibe at some of the frailties of our professional argot—a favorite pastime in his dialogs with fellow archivists. He also served on several of the Society's committees: Classification and Cataloging, International Relations, and Membership. In 1951 he was elected an honorary member in the Society, with lifetime tenure, and in 1958 he was enrolled in the Society's first selection of distinguished Fellows.

Like most leading archivists in America and Europe in this century, Dr. Hill's academic training and intellectual interests were basically historical. He worked variously and tirelessly as a teacher, writer, administrator, and consultant, and he traveled extensively and had a wide acquaintance abroad, especially in Latin America. He had grown up in post-Civil War Illinois, had attended Eureka College (A.B., 1900) and the University of Chicago (1903-4, 1907), and had initially taught in midwest high schools and in a mission school in Cuba (1901-8 *passim*). His first major archival project, and the one that established his reputation, was in Seville, in 1911-13, for J. Franklin Jameson's Department of Historical Research at the Carnegie Institution of Washington: the compilation of the *Descriptive Catalogue* of documents relating to United States history in a major collection of Spain's colonial records, the *Papeles Procedentes de Cuba*. He then taught history at universities—Columbia, California, New York, and New Mexico—1913-20 *passim*; headed the Spanish-American Normal School at El Rito, N. Mex., 1917-19; and served in the U. S. State Department, 1920-28, first

on the Nicaraguan High Commission and later on the Nicaraguan War Claims Commission. He earned his doctorate in 1933 at Columbia, working under William R. Shepherd, himself both a historical scholar and archival compiler.

Dr. Hill's archival career in the U. S. Government extended from 1928 to 1946, first at the Library of Congress and next at the National Archives. He served in the Library's European Mission, 1928-30, as director for Spain, and in its Division of Manuscripts, 1930-33, as historical editor of the last three volumes of the Continental Congress Journals—the monumental series whose earlier volumes had been edited by Worthington C. Ford, Gaillard Hunt, and John C. Fitzpatrick.

Early in May 1935 Dr. Hill left the Library for the National Archives, then being organized by the first Archivist of the United States, R. D. W. Connor. Dr. Hill was the first division chief to come on duty, and he served with distinction from 1935 to 1941 under Dr. Connor and from 1941 to 1946 under Solon J. Buck. For the first six years he was chief of the Division of Classification, where he sought experimentally to develop an all-inclusive classification pattern, along historically accurate organizational lines, as a device for registering, coding, and inventorying the entire past accumulations of the Government's records. Simultaneously he busied himself—and the staff of young historians whom he recruited for his division—with the prosaic work of compiling descriptive inventories (which he called "classification schemes") for specific collections. In 1941, when these functions (along with cataloging, reference, accessioning, and disposal) were reorganized and decentralized, Dr. Hill was named chief of the Division of State Department Archives. There he served until his retirement from Government service, in 1946.

In retrospect, Roscoe R. Hill was an interesting combination of the conservative and the progressive, essentially a traditionalist among the moderns, tenacious in opinion but gentle in spirit. He guided and stimulated a wide circle of historical students and scholars in the United States and abroad, and will be long remembered, with respect and fondness, by those who knew him well.