

Georg Winter, 1895-1961

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WHEN the Sixth International Conference of the Round Table on Archives met in Warsaw, Poland, from May 16 to 20, 1961, Georg Winter, Honorary Director of the German Federal Archives, attended it in his capacity of member of the Executive Committee of the International Archives Council. Although it was known to his friends that he was suffering from heart disease, little did they realize that so soon after the conference, on June 4, he would succumb to his ailment at the age of 66 years.

In Georg Winter the archival profession has lost one of its outstanding members, for, in a most remarkable fashion, he combined all those characteristics that make for preeminence in our field: practical experience in archival work based on sound principles, a most unusual administrative talent, and solid training and productive ability as a historical scholar. These qualities enabled him to continue in the great tradition of Heinrich von Sybel, Max Lehmann, and others who had established the reputation of the German archival school.

Born in the little city of Neuruppin in the Mark Brandenburg on April 28, 1895, he was to display throughout his lifetime the best attributes of the Prussian bureaucrat: great devotion to duty, meticulous working habits, fairness to others, and an unrelenting drive. Beneath these, however, were deep religious convictions—in Hitler's day Winter was to become a member of the Confessional Church—and a fine feeling for poetry and cultural values in general. After Winter had volunteered for service during World War I, he studied history and Germanics at the University of Berlin and received his doctor's degree with an excellent dissertation on the so-called *ministeriales*, the unfree nobility, of the Mark Brandenburg. Warmly recommended by his professors, he served his period of probationary training at the Prussian Privy State Archives and in 1922 was appointed to a position on its staff, after he had passed the notoriously stiff examination with flying colors. His first assignment put him in charge of the famous Record Group (*Repositur*) 9, which contains the general administrative records of the Brandenburg-Prussian Privy Council. By reorganizing extensive sequences of

small case files into major subject-related units and describing them in a detailed inventory he succeeded in making the contents of the group more readily accessible. Before he could finish the job, however, he was drawn into the great task of organizing the Prussian military archives that belatedly and from various sources had been transferred to the Privy State Archives. In the Prussian archival tradition, Winter did not fail to continue his scholarly activity. In addition to writing a number of fundamental articles on the principle of provenance, provoked by Karl Gustaf Weibull's demand for a "new orientation," he compiled and edited, as part of the *Publications of the Prussian Archives Administration*, the first volume of the records pertaining to the reform of the Prussian State under Stein and Hardenberg, a shining example of editorial ability and of superb knowledge of the period and of the materials themselves. To an ever increasing extent, however, his energies were diverted into administrative responsibilities. In 1930 Albert Brackmann, Director General of the Prussian State Archives, appointed him director of the newly established Institute for Archival Science and Advanced Historical Studies. To the exacting duties of this position, there were added in 1936 those of a staff adviser (*Fachreferent*) to the Director General of the State Archives.

In 1939 Winter joined the army as a captain in the reserve and company commander, but he was soon to be used in connection with the protection of archives in occupied countries. Difficult though his mandate was, he carried it out with so much tact and fairness that he earned for himself the respect of archivists in foreign lands—no small asset when later Germany was to be admitted to the International Archives Council.

After the collapse of Germany, Winter was glad to find a refuge as archivist of the City of Lüneburg. There he remained until, in 1952, he was appointed Director of the Federal Archives in Koblenz. It was a most happy choice, for only an archivist of Winter's qualities could overcome the towering difficulties that confronted the head of the newly established agency. Not only were its quarters and, at the beginning at least, its staff wholly inadequate, but its very holdings had to be brought together painstakingly, inasmuch as most of the records of the central government authorities were either in the Russian-occupied part of Germany or in the hands of the Western Allies. Of the latter, considerable quantities have been, and are being, returned to the custody of the Federal Archives. Also, thanks to Winter's unrelenting efforts, the agency has received up-to-date rented quarters in a high-rise building of fireproof construction.

Because of a progressively serious heart ailment, Winter had to retire at the normal age of 65, though the government had wanted to retain him in his position. He was able to be present at the formal opening of the new archives building, the realization of his efforts though not a fulfillment of the real wants of the Federal Archives as he saw them. Separated from the seat of the government and from the university in the capital city of Bonn, the agency could not, in Winter's opinion, fully meet its obligations. Still the Federal Archives in its new building, with its steadily increasing holdings and its impressive series of publications, remains a monument to the man who built it in every sense of the word and who will always be remembered as one of the great leaders in the world of archives.

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