

Dwight Hillis Wilson, 1909-1962

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National Archives

IT was my good fortune to share with Dwight Wilson an archival experience that he himself may have regarded as the most stimulating of his career. Our work in Caserta and Rome after World War II as members of the Allied Force Records Administration involved us and indeed all our staff in matters not usually of concern to American archivists. I recall very well, for instance, Dwight's courageous and forthright manner in many conferences—attended by representatives of the American and British diplomatic missions in Rome—at which, in the course of reaching agreements concerning the wartime military records jointly owned by the Allies, we occasionally found it necessary to remind the conferees of some basic archival principles. Dwight always held his own—no mean feat for any archivist under such circumstances but, if I may say so, a remarkable one for an American Negro confronting what may have seemed to him to be a devious politico-military cabal.

Such courage was but one side of this many-faceted scholar, teacher, and archivist. Other colleagues may recall more vividly his signal contribution to American archives through his chairmanship of the Society's Committee on College and University Archives in its earliest years. This issue of the *American Archivist* carries a report by Philip Mason in which it seems perfectly clear that developments in this field continue to proceed from programs set afoot by the committee during Dwight's chairmanship.

The life of such a man cannot be adequately summarized in this space. The son of a Methodist minister, he was born in Raleigh, N. C., on October 18, 1909, and was educated at Kittrell College, Shaw University, and Howard University. "Shelley as Revolutionist" was the subject of his master's thesis. Before entering the archival profession he had taught at Morris Brown College; and after the war years he became the first archivist of Fisk University. For "outstanding achievement in archival work" in 1949 he was awarded the Certificate of Recognition of the National Urban League. Allen University had honored him with its Litt. D. degree in 1939.

In his last years the illness that had afflicted him since boyhood overcame him, and he died on March 27, 1962, survived by his wife, Gheretein Ridgely Wilson, and a son, Dwight Hillis Wilson II. A memorial leaflet distributed by Mrs. Wilson attests—appropriately enough—to his love of words, "their meaning, their beauty, and their use." His reading had been wide and his studies deep; and through words he "opened up new dimensions of mind and spirit for many people." To create with words, "no matter what the occasion," was the main thing: "He was as proud of the blistering letter he wrote condemning plans to build a dog pound on a lot earmarked for a school as he was of a poem or an article."

Vale Dwight Wilson!