

# In Memoriam

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MARY GIVENS BRYAN

1910-1964

Born September 3, 1910, in La Grange, Georgia, the daughter of the late Young Clyde Givens and Janie Lou (Cox) Givens; educated in the public schools of Decatur and at Mount de Sales Academy in Macon, Georgia State College for Women, Crichton's Business College, Emory University, and the University of Georgia Evening College; professionally trained in special courses in archives administration and records management at The American University; clerk, secretary, and Assistant Director of the Georgia Department of Archives and History, 1934-50; Acting Director, 1950-51; Director and State Archivist, 1951-64; chairman of the State Records Committee of the Society of American Archivists, 1954-57; president of the Society of American Archivists, 1959-60; member of and officer in many patriotic, civic, and professional organizations; author of numerous articles and reports; died of acute nephritis in Piedmont Hospital, Atlanta, July 28, 1964.

So might read a sketch of Mary Givens Bryan in a future biographical history of Georgia.

But that doesn't tell the story of Mary Bryan. Her life defied description by cold facts. She did not just live and work and die. She needs no obituary except for those who did not know her: she wrote her own autobiography—not on paper, but in the hearts of all those whose lives she touched.

Mary Givens Bryan lived a life of happiness. Everywhere she went she radiated love and goodness. But she was not a stranger to sadness. Her mother died when Mary was but a child. Her marriage foundered not because of lack of love but because of her determination to become an archivist. She was blessed with incredibly good health and energy, but the misfortunes of others weighed heavily upon her own heart. She did not live to move her office into the marvelous new building for which she worked so hard. And only after death did she enter the beautiful new home in Decatur that she had purchased only a few weeks earlier. But, even so, Mary Bryan's story is a happy one. No one ever loved life more, and that love for life led her to spread cheer among all who knew her. She was not just an archivist. She was an archivist with unbounded enthusiasm. Her devotion to her chosen profession was and will remain an inspiration.

Without professional training and but 24 years of age, Mary became a clerk in the Georgia Department of Archives and History in 1934. For the next 16 years she patiently trained herself and was promoted successively to secretary, Assistant Director, Acting Director, and finally Director.<sup>1</sup> She

<sup>1</sup> For her own story of conditions in the early years of her archival career, see her article, "Recent Archival Developments in Georgia," *American Archivist*, 16:55-61 (Jan. 1953).

joined the Society of American Archivists in 1951 and 3 years later, in recognition of the mark that she had made upon her profession, she was appointed chairman of the State Records Committee. During her service in that capacity from 1954 to 1957 she inaugurated a series of committee publications that are among the most useful productions of the Society. She alone gathered material for and edited and published each year a *Comparative Study of State and U.S. Territorial Laws Governing Archives*, and she published reports prepared by other committee members on the subjects of records disposal, microphotography, salaries, and replevin of records. Her outstanding work resulted in her election, in 1959, to the office of president of the Society. The accomplishments of the SAA during her tenure are a matter of record, and her presidential address, "Changing Times,"<sup>2</sup> was an inspiring statement of her devotion to her chosen profession. Her service to the Society did not end with the expiration of her term. Indeed, she continued her many activities and this year was chairman of the Membership Development Committee. One of her last contributions was the supervision of a workshop for untrained custodians of records and manuscripts, held in Atlanta in April of this year. The success of this workshop—the first of its type ever held by the Society—will encourage all those undertaking similar ventures in the future.

After becoming Director and State Archivist in 1951, Mary Bryan built a closely knit archival department in Georgia and pioneered in the preservation of local records. From the beginning, however, she faced almost insurmountable physical handicaps. The Rhodes Memorial Hall, which served as the home of the State Archives, was leaky and squirrel infested. A less ingenious archivist might have given up. But Mary Bryan never gave up anything she started. She picked up soggy and squirrel-nibbled papers and waved them before the eyes of her fellow Georgians. Her mission was to save the history of Georgia and she crisscrossed the huge State, shaming her people for their neglect. Her mission was successful—almost unbelievably successful. Urged on by Mary Bryan and by her beloved Secretary of State, Ben W. Fortson, Jr., of whose office the Department of Archives and History is a part, the legislature appropriated nearly \$6 million for a new Archives Building. From that day forward Mary Bryan worked day and night with the architects to design the most marvelous State Archives Building in the United States.

In June Mary returned to Atlanta from Detroit, where she had been a key Government witness against an alleged thief of manuscripts. As she rode past the gleaming white building reaching nine stories above the ground (and five beneath it), she must have been the happiest archivist in the world. What many of her colleagues had half-jokingly, half-seriously called the "Mary Bryan Temple" was almost finished. Within a few weeks she could move into her huge walnut-paneled office with its vista of the State Capitol and the great Atlanta Thruway. Her beloved Georgia—often ridiculed for its backwardness—now could show the way for the other 49 States. Yes, Mary Givens Bryan, always happy, now had reason to be the proudest of us all!

<sup>2</sup> Published in the *American Archivist*, 24:3-10 (Jan. 1961).

But Mary had not been feeling well for several days, and upon her return to Atlanta her staff insisted that she check into the hospital for a rest. From the moment of her hospitalization her condition was serious. Then came the dreaded diagnosis: acute nephritis. Even so, her friends knew of her seemingly unbounded energy and many of them did not take her illness seriously at first. But a greater Judge had made His decision and Mary Bryan knew it. In her final weeks of suffering she was comforted by hundreds of messages of love, which flowed into Atlanta from all over the Nation. Always at her bedside was her friend, Beatrice Lang—affectionately known as “Bebe” to members of the Society.

Among her many friends who came to pay their respects at the First Methodist Church, Decatur, on the morning of July 30 were colleagues from throughout the country. Then, the following morning, according to her wishes, Mary Givens Bryan’s physical remains were interred in the ancient Oak Grove Cemetery at St. Marys in the southeasternmost tip of her beloved Georgia. It had been near this spot that she had for years found rest and comfort when, for a few days at a time, she could be persuaded to leave behind the toil and cares of her office.

There will be no need for another monument to Mary Givens Bryan, for she built two in her lifetime. The greater one is in the minds and hearts of all her friends and colleagues. The other one is the magnificent Georgia Archives Building. She worked herself to death in building both of them. It is appropriate (and Mary’s colleagues will be glad to know) that a movement was begun immediately to dedicate the new archival showplace as the Mary Givens Bryan Archives Building.

H. G. JONES

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EMMETT JOSEPH LEAHY

1910–1964

Emmett Joseph Leahy, pioneer in records management and a Fellow of the Society of American Archivists, died on June 23, 1964, of a cerebral thrombosis.

Leahy was born in Washington, D.C., on December 24, 1910, to parents from southern Ireland. In 1928 he was admitted on a probationary status to the Brothers of the Christian Schools, a teaching order of the Catholic Church. He withdrew from the order in 1934, before assuming a permanent status; in the meanwhile he had attended La Salle College (Pennsylvania), had received his bachelor’s degree from Catholic University, and had taken graduate work at Catholic University and the University of Pittsburgh. He later took additional graduate work at Harvard University and The American University.

After a short period with the Federal Trade Commission, Leahy in July 1935 joined the staff of the National Archives, where he remained until his appointment in September 1941 as Director of Records Coordination in the