

In Memoriam

ROBERT M. BROWN

1911-1965

Robert Malcolm Brown, Minnesota's first Archivist, died of diabetes in Midway Hospital, St. Paul, on May 31, 1965. Services for him were held on June 4 in Chippewa Falls, Wis., in the First Methodist Church, and interment was in the Forest Hills Cemetery. He is survived by his mother, Mrs. Amelia Brown, with whom he made his home in St. Paul, three brothers—Lyman, Daniel, and Patrick—and his sister, Mrs. Rachael B. Finch. His father and brother, both named Ford Brown, preceded him in death.

Born in Chippewa Falls on December 23, 1911, Bob received his elementary and secondary education in the local public schools. He attended the University of Notre Dame and Eau Claire State Teachers College before transferring to the University of Minnesota, from which he was graduated in 1939 as a Bachelor of Science. Entering the university's graduate school in 1939, he centered his studies on American history and political science. He was a teaching assistant in the history department during these years, and in 1942 he was awarded the degree of Master of Arts. With the Nation at war, he interrupted his studies to join the United States Navy. He was commissioned in 1943 and served in a motor torpedo squadron with the Seventh Fleet. After the war he was for several years a member of the Naval Reserve.

When he returned to civilian life, Bob taught history and political science at Rochester Junior College at Rochester, Minn. He resumed his graduate work at the University of Minnesota in 1947, and there he became a teaching assistant again and counselor for the Sigma Nu Fraternity.

In 1950, when the Minnesota Archives Commission selected him as the State's first Archivist, Bob began the career to which he was to devote his remaining years. The appointment was a propitious one, for he was a mid-westerner well schooled in the State's political traditions, a student of government and history during all his adult years, and a scholar who knew the resources of the Minnesota Historical Society, at that time custodian of both public records and private papers. He had written his master's thesis on the role of Minnesota's territorial delegates, a study that was a stern exercise in utilizing mid-19th-century source materials. To these qualifications were added personal traits that well fitted him for the position—intellectual precision, organizational ability, a capacity for mastering technical detail, enthusiasm, and the skill of a gentle propagandist so necessary in winning appropriations from the legislature and cooperation from agencies of State government.

He had need of all his talents and training in forging an archival and records program for Minnesota. Although the State had long been fortunate in its historical society (fashioned by outstanding scholars like Solon J. Buck, Theodore C. Blegen, Grace Lee Nute, and Bertha L. Heilbron), little had

been done to formulate a program for public records. The society, legally responsible for the records since 1915 but without appropriations to execute the responsibility, had performed a caretaker function—rescuing vital groups, housing them, and providing reference service. The breakthrough came in 1947 when the Minnesota Archives Commission was created, and the long journey toward the achievement of a respectable records program for the State began with Bob's appointment 3 years later.

Beginning his work in an office provided by the society and assisted by a clerk-typist, Bob addressed himself to the task. When he closed his 15-year service with the commission, he had consolidated many of the State's important records in a spacious, though admittedly inadequate, building near the Capitol, instituted procedures for records management, established a records center for materials of temporary value, installed laminating, microfilming, and fumigating equipment, secured legislation centralizing in the commission responsibility for records on the local as well as the State level, and assumed reference service on census records long borne by the historical society. During this time, the staff grew from 2 to 10 and the biennial budget from \$20,728 to \$149,809.

The pressure of work in these busy years left him little time for research and writing. His publications bear witness to the subject matter that became his basic intellectual commitment—public records in Minnesota. In 1954 he prepared a mimeographed study of legislation, with full commentary, entitled *A Report on Public Records in Minnesota*; this study was updated and reissued in 1957. He also wrote two articles analyzing the Minnesota program for the *American Archivist* (Jan. 1953; July 1963), and his study of the State seal appeared in *Minnesota History* (Autumn 1952).

His interest in the Society of American Archivists was also witness to his professional dedication. A member since 1950, he served on the Committee on State Records from 1956 to 1963, acting as committee chairman from 1958 to 1960; and in 1965, at the time of his death, he was a member of the committee preparing the annual meeting program. In 1962 SAA recognized his contributions both to the organization and to the archives movement by naming him a Fellow.

To his family and staff came many messages that reflect the regard in which Bob was held and sorrow at the untimely end of a useful life. Stafford King, Minnesota's auditor and charter member of the State Archives Commission, who perhaps knew him best, wrote: "Minnesota suffered a real and startling loss in Bob's death. It will, indeed, be difficult to find a successor, and perhaps, impossible to find a comparable replacement. Through his training and experience, and by virtue of his tenacity of purpose, his loyalties, his will to do, and his abiding consciousness of responsibility, he will be a hard man to replace. We will miss him as a skilled craftsman and as a great friend—but it was good to have had him with us even for such a little time."

LUCILE M. KANE
Minnesota Historical Society

THE AMERICAN ARCHIVIST