

In Memoriam

RICHARD GEORGE WOOD, 1900-1967



WHEN he attended the Extraordinary Congress of the International Council on Archives in Washington last spring, even though his successor, Charles T. Morrissey, had not yet been publicly named, Richard G. Wood happily announced that he had retired the preceding Friday, thus closing 10 busy years as director of the Vermont Historical Society. He and Mrs. Wood were poised to move from Montpelier to the ancestral Wood farmstead, Broad Acres, in the town of Randolph, N.H. Here where U.S. Highway 2 from Burlington to Bangor traverses the main east-west pass through the White Mountains, beside the big

red barn and with the Presidential Range for backdrop, he intended to garden and write to his full content.

Come November, though, his physician laid a ban on going out into the cold. So, intent as ever on local background, Dr. Wood drafted the beginning of a study of lumbering in New Hampshire and worked away on ideas for Randolph's upcoming bicentennial, tackling the "Place Names of Randolph" for himself. When the January thaw of 1967 extended even to this corner of the North Country, only 10 miles from Mt. Washington, he welcomed the chance to get outside for research.

He spent the afternoon of Wednesday, January 25, poring over records in a selectman's office at Gorham, N.H., 6 miles away. But when Mrs. Wood was driving him home, while still in the environs of Gorham, he slumped in his seat with a fatal heart attack. Despite falling temperatures and a storm of fog and snow on the afternoon of Saturday, the 28th, the final service was held from the homestead, with interment in nearby Randolph Cemetery.

Besides his wife, whom he married in 1938 as Ruth Leavitt Cherry, and her daughter, Mrs. Thomas McConnell, he is survived by three sisters: Mrs. Frances Brown, Mrs. Effie Penney, and Miss Catherine Wood, the post-mistress at Randolph.

Richard George Wood was born in Randolph on April 19, 1900, the son of Francis C. and Florence Farrar Wood. Here too and at Bellows Falls, Vt.,

came his early schooling. He finished Bellows Falls High School in June 1918 and that fall entered Dartmouth College, at Hanover, N.H. Until a month after the Armistice he was in the Student Army Training Corps. Majoring in history, he received his B.A. degree with the Class of '22, to which and to Dartmouth he was ever loyal. In later life he took special pleasure in writing the life of a member of the Class of 1809, the topographical engineer Stephen Harriman Long (published in the *Frontier Military Series* by Arthur H. Clark Co., Glendale, Calif., in 1966).

The first winter after graduating, probably already a disciple of Thoreau, young Wood toiled in the snowy forests of Maine on the shores of Lake Aziscoos as a scaler of long lumber. But from the end of February to June of 1923 he taught industrial history in the Commercial High School of New Haven, Conn. Yet it was not to Yale but to Harvard University in Cambridge, Mass., that Wood turned for graduate guidance. He embraced the rare chance to take seminars with both Frederick Jackson Turner and Frederick Merk, coming away from Cambridge in June 1924 with the Harvard M.A. degree.

For a year, 1924-25, he taught history at Laconia High School in his native New Hampshire, taking the State university's extension course in educational psychology and picking up a New Hampshire teacher's license. But in September 1925 he backtracked to Cambridge for further residence until June 1928 in the Harvard Graduate School of Arts and Sciences. Concurrently for 2 of these years he taught modern European history at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

He shifted next to the faculty of the University of Maine. During his 6½ years at Orono, September 1928 to March 1935, he established himself as an assistant professor, teaching chiefly American and Canadian history, historical method, and even some European and English history. The Harvard Ph. D. degree was conferred upon him in 1934. His study, *A History of Lumbering in Maine, 1820-1861*, was published by the University of Maine in 1935, the year that reorganization of the Arts College caused him to sever his roots at Orono. The volume, however, proved to be a classic, and the University Press there reprinted it after a quarter of a century (*University of Maine Studies, Second Series*, no. 33; 1961).

Starting in November 1935 he engaged in historical research for a year as associate director of the Federal Writers' Project in New Hampshire. From November 1936 to March 1940, as State Director of the Historical Records Survey there, he exercised general supervision over inventorying local and church archives, together with editing and publishing the New Hampshire checklist. From March 1940 to June 1942 a wide variety of projects fell under his jurisdiction as State Supervisor of WPA Records and Research.

From August to November he worked in the post engineer's office at the Air Base at Houlton, Maine, but he elected to enter the National Archives in Washington by transfer on November 16, 1942. With his qualifications, not the least of which was willingness to labor, he made a success of an archival career that moved him from the Central Search Room, through Navy records,

into a forest of Army records. Along the way he audited an American University course in archivology and surveyed the 20th-century agency records of the Library of Congress. He produced several finding aids that are still in use at the National Archives. He became the logical and respected head of the Old Army Section, War Records Branch, National Archives and Records Service.

He edited the reviews for the *American Archivist* for a dozen years; kept aware of the historical developments in New Hampshire and Vermont; participated in national meetings of the American Historical Association, the American Association for State and Local History, and the Society of American Archivists; and published articles in a variety of journals. When he resigned his Washington job, on October 26, 1956, to direct the Vermont Historical Society, he retreated to New England solely on the basis of his previous record there; but he continued to maintain close contacts with his professional and personal friends at the National Archives. From Vermont he served on the editorial board of the *American Archivist*, and from there he operated as program chairman for the 1965 SAA meeting in New York.

His service to the Vermont Historical Society and to the State of his adoption was exceptional. He worked intimately with Olney Hill, the Vermont records officer, and effectively cooperated with other Vermont authorities. The Governor made him Chairman of the State's Civil War Centennial Commission. Under Dr. Wood the books, manuscripts, and artifacts of the historical society were moved across the State House lawn to their present improved quarters. The Rugg and other collections were acquired, and old Kent Tavern at Calais was opened to the public. He not only regularly edited the society's monthly *News and Notes* and the quarterly *Vermont History*, but he painstakingly edited a genealogic marvel, *People of Peacham*, published by the society in 1965. Walter M. Whitehill commented that the Vermont Historical Society was "fortunate in having a director of such professional experience who was temperamentally congenial to the character of the state."

In his retirement to Randolph, N.H., Dr. Wood continued to be a Fellow of the SAA, Vice President of the Justin Smith Morrill Foundation, a Trustee of the American Precision Museum, and a Trustee of the Vermont Historical Society.

H. B. FANT

National Historical Publications Commission

The Educative Task

In the task of development, man, who finds his life's primary environment in the family, is often aided by professional organizations. If it is their objective to promote the interests of their members, their responsibility is also great with regard to the educative task which at the same time they can and ought to accomplish. By means of the information they provide and the formation they propose, they can do much to give to all a sense of the common good and of the consequent obligations that fall upon each person.

—POPE PAUL VI, Encyclical Letter *Populorum Progressio*, Mar. 28, 1967, para. 38.