

THEODORE C. BLEGEN
1891-1969

Theodore C. Blegen, dean emeritus of the University of Minnesota and research fellow of the Minnesota Historical Society, died at his home in St. Paul on July 18, 1969. A man of remarkable versatility, he has left behind a record of service as a teacher, administrator, author, editor, collector, and friend to the archival profession.

Dean Blegen was born in Minneapolis of Norwegian immigrant parents in 1891. He received a B.A. degree in 1910 from Augsburg College, where his father, John H. Blegen, was professor of Greek. The University of Minnesota conferred upon him an M.A. in 1915 and a Ph. D. in 1925. After teaching in Wisconsin and Minnesota high schools, he became professor of history at Hamline University, St. Paul (1920-27); lecturer, associate professor, and professor of history at the University of Minnesota (1927-39); and dean of the graduate school (1940-60). He began his career with the Minnesota Historical Society as assistant superintendent in 1922 while teaching at Hamline; and in 1931, succeeding Solon J. Buck, he became superintendent, a post from which he resigned in 1939 to complete the second volume of his book *Norwegian Migration to America*. Upon his retirement from the university in 1960, he rejoined the society's staff as research fellow.

It was as a student of Norwegian immigration that Dean Blegen became most widely known. "It would be an exaggeration," Henry Steele Commager has written, "to say that he pioneered in opening up the field of immigration, but no exaggeration to say that no one has contributed more to the cultivation of that field." To his works of traditional scholarship on immigration he added Norwegian ballads, which he collected, published, and sang. "Oleana," one of the immigrant songs he adapted and polished, became a popular radio tune.

Even a cursory review of the volumes on Dean Blegen's long bookshelf reveals a remarkable range of interest and competence. In addition to works on immigration, he wrote about Sherlock Holmes (he was a member of the Baker Street Irregulars), Abraham Lincoln, education, and the mysterious Kensington Rune Stone. His persistent fascination with the history of his native State, expressed earlier in such books as *Building Minnesota* and in his editorship of *Minnesota History*, the society's quarterly magazine, culminated in *Minnesota: A History of the State*, published in 1963.

His concern about private manuscripts and public records, which continued throughout his life, began early in his career. While teaching in Riverside High School in Milwaukee (1915-19), he sought to "bring history close to home" by sending his students on "attic hunts" for family papers. Working in collaboration with Grace Lee Nute, the Minnesota Historical Society's great curator of manuscripts, he increased the scope and professionalism of the institution's collecting. To him, like Parkman and Draper, the roles of historian and collector were wedded. In Norway, which he visited to work on his books, he ranged the country searching for "America letters." And, preparing his last book, *The Kensington Rune Stone*, he followed with Holmesian zest clues that might lead to hidden sources.

Dean Blegen made his most intensive study of public records in 1917, when he reviewed Wisconsin's "archives situation" at the request of the State

Historical Society. His analysis, published in 1918 as *A Report on the Public Archives*, included not only proposals for the management of Wisconsin's records, but a survey of archival practices in Europe, on the Federal level in the United States, and in the individual States. "The public archives of a state," he wrote in concluding the report, "constitute its truest monument of the past. Let none suppose that a state, great in name and great in fact, can long be so untrue to its greatness and dignity as to fail to take proper steps to preserve carefully and administer scientifically its public archives . . ."

In 1935, then superintendent of the Minnesota Historical Society, Theodore Blegen made another contribution to the archival profession. At a conference of archivists meeting with the American Historical Association in Chattanooga, Tenn., he read a paper that articulated a proposal then being discussed to organize an "Institute of American Archivists." The institute, conceived as "a point of contact" among archivists, would, Dean Blegen commented, "render a significant and enduring service not only to archivists as a professional class . . . but also to American administration and scholarship." He was a member of the "committee of ten" appointed at the meeting to frame a constitution for the proposed organization, which was then named the Society of American Archivists.

Although his direct participation in archival affairs was limited in the succeeding years, his concern was not. He read literature in the field and, typically, expressed pleasure in the progress the profession had made since his foray into Wisconsin's records. Typically, too, he took a keen interest in the archives of the University of Minnesota. "Dean Blegen was influential in establishing an active archival program at the University in 1946," comments Maxine Clapp, the university's Archivist, "and throughout the years he was a constant friend and strong supporter of the work."

The final gift of this gentle and urbane scholar to the university's archivists was a collection of his papers; and to a new generation of staff at the society, which he joined after an absence of 21 years, his final gift was a transmission of professional traditions, made not with nostalgia, but with the perceptions of a contemporary man.

LUCILE M. KANE
Minnesota Historical Society

ELIZABETH HAWTHORN BUCK
1893-1970

The following statements are parts of remarks that were presented by Ken Munden and Ernst Posner at a retirement luncheon for Elizabeth H. Buck in Washington, D.C., on April 2, 1964. They were published in the issue of March-April 1964 of *Archi-Views*, the newsletter of the National Archives and Records Service Employees' Association. The remarks aptly express the high esteem in which Mrs. Buck was held by members of the archival profession.

EDITOR

VERY SPECIAL TALENTS

On this occasion, Elizabeth, some of the several worlds in which you move are merged happily and memorably. That yours is a life of cheerfully productive toil—yet accruing few taxable royalties—we are here to certify.

THE AMERICAN ARCHIVIST

We do this soberly, without exaggeration—but with devotion, even with love. Among us are many whose scholarship is less suspect than it might have been—because you contributed to its making; whose goals remain beyond the horizon—because you have set our sights; whose enthusiasm does not abate—because you fan the fire of it.

Shall each of us here speak to these points? Give testimony to the humor, the sophistication, the urbanity, the discriminating taste that underlies your very special talents? Can we tell it now—all of it, or part of it—how, when we are not righteous, you show your inner wrath; how, when we can not write, you ghost for us; how—and believe me!—when we think we need a mother, you convince us that it is not so?

KEN MUNDEN
American Film Institute

WE CLAIM HER AS AN ARCHIVIST

“Rules and regulations” is a term Elizabeth dearly loves, because like a pair they always go hand in hand. It certainly is against all rules and regulations that I, an archival sidewalk superintendent, should be called upon to bid farewell to Elizabeth Buck, soon to retire from the National Archives, to sing her praises as an archivist, an editor, a friend, and a lady of everlasting charm. I shall skip the mother, the grandmother, and the doctor Litt. D. from Hobart College.

We had archival dynasties, or rather husband and wife teams, in this country before. To say nothing about the Hamers, Mrs. Thomas Owen, Sr. succeeded her husband and for many decades ruled the Alabama Department of Archives and History with an iron hand, and Mrs. Dunbar Rowland helped Dr. Rowland to build the Mississippi Department, treading with him “the path of pain and struggle without a murmur,” as it says in one of the Mississippi reports. It was different with the Bucks, for it was only after Dr. Buck had gone to the Library of Congress in 1948 that Elizabeth entered the National Archives scene to help with the edition of the *Federal Records of World War II*. In 1951 she joined the Exhibits and Publications Branch on a full-time basis, and soon she emerged from her editorial cocoon as an archivist.

Yes, we claim her in the first place as an archivist, although she always denies categorically that she is one. But who among us was subjected to sterner training than she, a strictly tutorial system? Over many a cup of coffee, over many a bowl of tomato soup, and over her own lemon-meringue pie—also known as the yellow peril—the autocrat of the breakfast and dinner table taught her the fine points of archival theory, the distinction between noncurrent and nonactive records, the difference between *fonds* and record groups, and many other subtleties. One of her last and lasting deeds was her energetic fight against those false prophets and impostors who wanted to desecrate the principle of *respect des fonds* by calling it the principle of *respect pour les fonds*. Elizabeth thundered her anathema and it stuck.

Her training in things archival stood her in good stead as an editor of National Archives preliminary inventories that came to her desk in their most preliminary stages, of the *Hamer Guide*, the Munden and Beers *Guide to Archives and Manuscripts Relating to the Civil War*, and of other publications too numerous to mention. Since 1952 she has helped to edit the *American*

Archivist as an associate editor, surviving two editors and now serving with Ken Munden—we hope *ad infinitum*. Her blue-penciling is not of the vindictive kind, although her editorial path is littered with prior to's, subsequently's and implementations that she has slaughtered en route. How well I know! Elizabeth's editorial skill might well be compared to the art of the medieval alchemist. With a touch of her magic pen she converts mediocre substance into more or less precious metal, reading the author's mind, bleaching his purple prose, disentangling sentences, slenderizing what is clumsy and sharpening what is dull. Her last major job consisted in translating into English the Anglo-German text of my report on the American State Archives, a labor of more than two months, 700 pages of it, and I am afraid the immediate cause of her resignation.

Her editorial excellence is of course but a manifestation of her literary inspiration. Author of four books of juvenile fiction based on history and collaborator with her husband, she contributed much to making *The Planting of Civilization in Western Pennsylvania* the polished opus that it is, she drafted the text of the National Archives pamphlet *Charters of Freedom*, occasionally she ghostwrote speeches and articles for National Archives officials, and the last issue of *Archivum* has her masterful essay on "The National Archives and Records Service." The finest part of her collected works, however, the cream of the crop, is scattered through the columns of *Archi-Views*—difficult to detect because, as reviewers say: There is no index. Quoting from one of her contributions in 1960, when many of us were flocking to the Stockholm and Boston conventions:

I simply cannot mention all
Conventions in the year,
But I am UN-CONVENTIONAL,
I stay here.

Yes, we respect Elizabeth as an archivist, as an editor, as a writer, but we love her because she is unconventional, because she is she. We wish her Godspeed, and we adapt to the occasion what she said to "Phil the Phenomenon or Hamer the *Hincredible*" when he left the National Archives:

So now we stand to give you praise,
O mistress of the pen,
And simply say: we shall not look
Upon your like again.

ERNST POSNER
Washington, D.C.