

Recent Death

JULIAN PARKS BOYD, 1903–1980. At a White House luncheon given by President Kennedy on 17 June 1963 for the editors and supporters of projects for publication of the papers of leading figures in American history, Julian P. Boyd gave an appreciative response. He recalled that Thomas Jefferson, whose great collection of manuscripts, books, maps, and newspapers had become the foundation of our national library, “believed the preservation and study of ‘these precious monuments of our history’ to be a matter of public concern.” On numerous occasions the editor of the *Papers of Thomas Jefferson* reaffirmed this concern; indeed it was the principal theme of his professional life as historian and historical editor.

Born 3 November 1903 in Converse, Spartanburg County, South Carolina, Julian Parks Boyd prepared for college in Charlotte, North Carolina, and sought his higher education at Trinity College in the “Old North State.” His interest in history, if not already self-motivated, was stimulated by courses under Professor William Kenneth Boyd (no kin), who, aware of the rich resources of southern history in private hands, had begun collecting them for the college library. Julian Boyd, Class of ’25, received his B.A. degree from Duke University, the new institution which in December 1924 had become the successor of Trinity College.

A year of graduate work (M.A., 1926), with Professor Boyd as his mentor, and another year (1927–28) at the University of Pennsylvania, ended his formal education. In the challenging career that ensued, the young historian found neither time nor need for the Ph.D. During the course of his achievements, eight honorary degrees were conferred on him, the first as early as 1939 in Pennsylvania (Litt.D., Franklin and Marshall College), where the quality of his historical work was becoming widely recognized.

Boyd’s first professional appointment, as editor of the Wyoming Historical and Geological Society, Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, occurred in 1928, when Boyd was twenty-four. Here he gained valuable experience in assembling, probing, and selecting for publication the records of the controversial Susquehanna Company. Because the documents were preserved in numerous repositories, “the problem of scattered and discrete materials,” wrote the editor, “has forced upon us the necessity of adding the benefits and pleasures of research to the task of editing.” Four volumes of the Papers, each with a historical introduction, were published by the society (1930–33). Meanwhile, Boyd had become director of the New York State Historical Association at Ticonderoga (1932–34), when new opportunities beckoned as librarian of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania and editor of the *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* (1934–40).

The abundance of manuscript and printed sources in the society’s library brought about fruitful collaboration resulting in the publication of *Indian Treaties Printed by Benjamin Franklin* (1938), the texts in facsimile, with introduction by Carl Van Doren and historical and bibliographical notes by Boyd. During his last year at the society, Boyd utilized an influential Committee on Objectives to announce in the *Magazine* (April 1940) “A Statement of Policy,” outlining a comprehensive basis for the promulgation of history in the interest of the layman as well as the scholar, to broaden the society’s objectives and augment its usefulness.

In 1940 Boyd became librarian of Princeton University, but it was Boyd the historian who soon arrived at the major turning-point in his life as historical scholar and scholar’s editor. As harbinger of monumental work to come, he edited *The Declaration of Independence: The Evolution of the Text* (1943), issued by the Library of Congress in celebrating the bicentennial of Jefferson’s birth. Meanwhile, as historian of the Thomas Jefferson Bicentennial Commission, he had written a *Report . . . on the Need, Scope, and Proposed Method of Preparation . . . [for] Publishing a Comprehensive Edition of the Writings of Thomas Jefferson* (1943). Boyd urged that the comprehensive edition be “so extensive in the number of documents it embraces and so accurate in presentation that the work need never be done

again." The commission approved the *Report* and its historian was appointed editor of the *Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, projected as forty-two volumes, later as sixty.

With Princeton University Press as publisher, the first volume appeared in 1950. When a copy was presented to President Truman, his high praise of the work embraced a recommendation that the papers of other American leaders be edited and published as part of the national heritage. Thus was inaugurated a new era of comprehensive historical editing, emulating Boyd's high standards of scholarship. His meticulous editing, lucid annotations, and occasional introductory essays to documents correlating public issues, enhanced the historical significance of the primary sources. He served as exemplar for editors of the papers of Franklin, Hamilton, the Adamsses, and innumerable others.

In 1952 Boyd was appointed professor of history at Princeton, emeritus in 1972. Those twenty years covered his most productive period as historical editor; by 1970 the *Jefferson Papers* totaled 17 volumes, besides essays he had written as a member of various learned societies. As the rate of production of the *Papers* declined during the 1970s, some critics argued that the historical introductory essays were expendable; that a minimum of annotation of the documents sufficed; that, for the most part, the documents could speak for themselves. And how long must one wait until they became available through the editorial process? Boyd, however, had long since deplored "the state of criticism within the historical guild that would view . . . [carefully edited texts] as a development that might possibly be or soon become an undesirable thing." The essential task of the editor could not be abridged with impunity. He must make haste slowly, with deliberation; and the microfilm camera was no substitute for the critical editor.

Nineteen volumes had been published before his death on 28 May 1980. He is survived by his widow, Grace, and son Kenneth Miles Boyd. The volumes of *Papers* are his chief bequest to the historical editors who were his contemporaries and to the younger generation who follow. His concern for the original records as useable archives, for their availability by means of the editor's craft and sensitivity, and for their historical context elucidated by the editor as historian, comprehends the achievement of Julian Boyd as a universal scholar who found his exemplar in Jefferson. In the editor's "General View of the Work" in Volume 1, it is not surprising to read that "above all, these volumes should be regarded as the embodiment of an idea."

LESTER J. CAPPON, *The Newberry Library*