



Oliver W. Holmes

Oliver W. Holmes was in that first generation of professional archivists at the National Archives—those who in the Depression decade found jobs with the new agency when it opened in 1935. The following year he became a founding member of the Society of American Archivists, thus marking his strong professional identification from the outset. At the National Archives he was successively chief of the Interior Department archives (1938-41), director of research

and records description (1942-45), program advisor (1945-48), chief of the Natural Resources Records Branch (1948-61), and executive director of the National Historical Publications Commission (1961-72), the position from which he retired.

Throughout his life, he was a faithful and highly influential member of the SAA. From 1946 to 1951 he chaired the Committee on International Relations. He was a member of Council from 1948 to 1951 and served as vice president in 1957-58. For his outstanding profes-

sional contributions, the SAA named him a Fellow in 1958. Then in 1958-59 he served as president. The following year he chaired the Professional Standards Committee. In 1961 he won the Waldo Gifford Leland Prize for his SAA presidential address. Recognizing his signal contributions to the profession, SAA in 1979 established the Holmes Award to enable archivists from foreign countries to visit repositories in the United States.

Some of Oliver's publications were landmarks in the literature of archival theory and history. Among his important articles published in the *American Archivist* are "The Evaluation and Preservation of Business Archives" (October 1938); "The National Archives and the Protection of Records in War Areas" (April 1946); "The National Archives at a Turn in the Road" (October 1949); "'Public Records'—Who Knows What They Are?" his SAA presidential address published in January 1960; "Archival Arrangement—Five Different Operations at Five Different Levels" (January 1964); and "Toward an International Archives Program and Council, 1945-1950" (July 1976). Any archivist would be pleased to have his work cited and quoted as often as Oliver's 1964 article on archival arrangement has been.

In addition to publishing articles on archival theory and history in the SAA journal, Oliver contributed such essays elsewhere. Examples include "Territorial Government and the Records of its Administration" in a volume from the University of Illinois Press in 1967; "Managing Our Spanish and Mexican Southwestern Archival Legacy" in the *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* in 1968; and "Indian-Related Records in the National Archives and Their Use" in a book from the Howard University Press in 1976. As the titles of these essays suggest, Oliver never lost his in-

terest in the history of the American West. That interest, engendered by his upbringing in Minnesota and enhanced by his education (B.A., Carleton College, 1922; Ph.D., Columbia University, 1956), may have lain dormant as Oliver fulfilled his administrative responsibilities at the National Archives, but it never atrophied. Oliver's career continues to challenge today's professional archivists not to abandon the scholarly interests that originally led them to archival work. Writing on Western history and on archival history and theory, Oliver made the finest contribution he could: writing about the archival dimensions of Western history.

As a student of the history of transportation on the American frontier, Oliver loved to associate with others interested in the West. He was a founding member and past sheriff of the Potomac Corral of Westerners. Oliver will be missed at the annual meetings of the SAA; he will be missed as much at the monthly gatherings of the Corral and at the yearly conferences of the Western History Association (WHA), which in 1980, recognizing his important contributions to the field, conferred on him an Award of Merit.

Oliver was a professional through and through. He attended the Berkeley meeting of SAA last September, long after travel had become difficult for him. A delightful memory of Oliver concerns travel. He and his wife, Dorothy, were among those on SAA's three-week tour of Archives of the Ancient World in the summer of 1976. One hot afternoon in Athens, after most of our group had retired to the tavernas, my wife and I explored the agora. The only archivist we encountered was Oliver. Armed with the maps in Ernst Posner's *Archives of the Ancient World*, he was searching for the exact spot where the Athenian city-state kept its archives. And he found it. Oliver

W. Holmes's career and life exemplified the scholar's search. As archivist and historian, he produced valuable findings that will light our way well into the future.

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Dr. Holmes's family requests that any memorial contributions be made to the Oliver Wendell Holmes Travel Award, established by the Society of American Archivists in 1979 to assist the travel of foreign archivists already in the United States. Checks should be made out to SAA with a notation that they are for the Holmes Award. They should be sent to the Society's Chicago office. All contributions are tax deductible.

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