

scholarly annotated bibliography,' according to a reviewer in *The Times Literary Supplement* (England). An American reviewer called it 'a model bibliography.' Indeed, Gaines himself was the very model of the amateur scholars who combine with those who happen to make their living by poking around in libraries to give the membership of the American Antiquarian Society (the rolls of which Gaines joined in October 1958) its special character. During his twenty years of association with the Society, Gaines was a most generous and loyal member. Out of his own library of some 4,600 titles, he helped AAS fill a number of gaps in our own collection of early political writings and Carey imprints. After his death, his library went to the University of Connecticut in Storrs.

Pete Gaines had bouts with illness off and on in recent years. During his last struggle, with leukemia, he maintained his interest in early political writings as long as he could. Our last contact with him in fact was in the course of readying for the printer the last installment of additions and amendments to his *Political Writings*. His illness kept him from checking the proofs of the article and his death from ever seeing the final printed product. His survivors include his wife, Carolyn Livingston (Fliess) Gaines, whom he married on July 28, 1934, and with whom he shared the joys and pains of restoring and maintaining a pre-Revolutionary saltbox house on seven acres of land in Fairfield, Connecticut; two daughters, Julie Phelan and Carolyn Roberson; and one son, Pierce Welch Gaines, Jr.

John B. Hench

FREDERICK MERK

Frederick Merk, who taught American history at Harvard University and Radcliffe College for thirty-nine years, died on September 24, 1977, a few weeks after celebrating his ninetieth birthday. Professor Merk was certainly one of the

most effective as well as one of the best-loved teachers at Harvard in this century. His dedication to teaching and scholarship was so marked—a dedication shared with his wife, Lois Bannister Merk, who was professor of history for many years at Northeastern University—that to talk about Fred is to talk about his career.

For many years he shared the basic survey course, 'The Growth of the American Nation,' with Arthur Schlesinger, Sr., in which Merk gained a splendid reputation for his careful, orderly presentations of the American past. It was his course on 'The Westward Movement,' however, which he began teaching after the retirement of Frederick Jackson Turner in 1923, that students remember best. They referred to it as 'Wagon Wheels' or 'Cowboys and Indians' and came to call Merk, in his later years, 'Harvard's Mr. Chips,' for he was always concerned about his students and was always available for consultation. The care and thoroughness with which he led the students across the continent as he detailed the westward movement led some to call it 'Creeping and Crawling.' The late Wallace Evans Davies, a former student of Merk's, and an admirer, recalled that a roommate once came in from a lecture feigning exhaustion and explained that Merk had gotten them across a 'whole county' in frontier Illinois that day. All of the nicknames were born of an abiding respect and affection for Merk and his scholarship. When, after many years of working on the *Harvard Guide to American History*, of which he was a co-editor, he published his first major book, *Manifest Destiny and Mission in American History: A Reinterpretation*, he dedicated it to 'my Harvard and Radcliffe Students—Always an Inspiration.' They had already reciprocated by establishing a library book fund in his honor at the time of his retirement from Harvard in 1957.

Fred Merk was born in Milwaukee on August 15, 1887. After attending high school there he enrolled in the University of Wisconsin and received his A.B. degree in 1911.

Merk's early commitment to American history was greatly increased by the presence of Frederick Jackson Turner at Wisconsin, but before he could take a course with him, Turner accepted a chair at Harvard. Fred joined the editorial staff of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin for five years and in 1912 brought out an edition of the *Civil War Messages and Proclamations of Wisconsin's War Governors*. In 1916 he was named Edward Austin Fellow at Harvard where he finally had the opportunity to work with Turner. His dissertation, completed in 1920, was awarded the Toppan Prize.

Appointed a tutor in history, government, and economics at Harvard in 1918, Merk rose through the ranks and by 1936 had become a professor. These were the years when he established himself as an authority on the diplomacy of American expansion by writing a series of brilliant articles on the acquisition of Oregon. These were also the years in which outstanding students came to Harvard to work with him in a variety of fields. Paul Wallace Gates pursued the study of land policy; Richard Overton and Alfred Chandler specialized in economic and railroad history; and, later, Rodman Paul focused on the history of the mining frontier. In 1931 Fred married Lois Bannister, who had been a graduate student in his seminar. After serving as head of the Harvard history department for five years (1941-46) he was named Gurney Professor of History and Political Science, a title he continued to hold as emeritus after his retirement.

For those who knew Fred Merk well, the reasons for his success as a teacher and a scholar were obvious. Every interview or personal encounter was a professionally rewarding experience. In the place of small talk he substituted an excitement about the research he was doing or a new book he had read. At the same time he was cautious about rushing into print, and on more than one occasion objected to Harvard's policy of permitting outside scholars to see dissertations before they were revised for publication. They were, he

said, still 'unripe' and not ready for public use. He himself waited so long to publish that colleagues often despaired that any of his superb notes would ever make it to the printed page.

Other qualities were revealed in his brief, formal letters, usually written in a clear but spidery hand, and in his lectures. A touch of unexpected humor would lighten a serious discussion, and in class students would look for the twinkle in his eye as he would epitomize French and British rivalry in the fur trade as really a battle between 'brandy and rum.' Or suddenly he might act out the habits of a beaver to illustrate the problems trappers faced in catching their prey. These humorous touches came in the books and articles, too, but more often the writings were characterized by a quiet eloquence captured in a few brief phrases, an eloquence that increased when he sorted out the mistaken policies and villains in American history from the heroes and the 'true mission' of America. Merk felt strongly, as did Frederick Jackson Turner, that speculation had been the ruination of an orderly and democratic development of the West. And while he himself felt that it was the mission of America to expand the areas of freedom, he criticized Tyler and Polk for their aggressive expansionist policies in the 1840s in his book *Manifest Destiny and Mission*, which he published at the age of seventy-six. 'Continentalism and imperialism never were true expressions of the national spirit,' he wrote in his concluding chapter. 'A truer expression of the national spirit was Mission. This was present from the beginning of American history, and is present, clearly today. It was idealistic, self-denying, hopeful of divine favor for national aspirations, though not sure of it. It made itself heard authentically in times of emergency, of ordeal, of disaster. Its language was that of dedication—dedication to the enduring values of American civilization. It was the language of Abraham Lincoln in the Civil War.'

Just how deeply Fred felt about America's proper role in the world was expressed both in a book, *Dissent in Three American Wars* (1970), and in a letter to Keyes Metcalf, a fellow member of the American Antiquarian Society, in 1971 in which he remarked, 'It is lamentable that our institutions of learning are in their present financial plight while the government lavishes its means on war in Vietnam, on anti-ballistic missiles and flights to the moon.'

Fred was often asked why he did not write a textbook on the westward movement based on his lectures and his remarkable notes. He seems to have felt he was not ready and delayed until most friends thought he had abandoned the idea. Perhaps he felt his notes were still 'unripe'; but one suspects that the reason was the overwhelming dedication to teaching. When Ted Shipton, the librarian of AAS, congratulated him on his retirement in 1957, Fred replied, 'Thank you for your note of congratulations on my emancipation. The truth is that the word "emancipation" does not quite fit the case. I am a runaway. I had a year's service still to put in on my appointment. I withdrew in order that I might have complete freedom for my writing.' Over the next fifteen years he published five books. His wife would assist in the research and assembling of materials while Fred would do the writing. The results were impressive: *Manifest Destiny and Mission* (1963) was followed by *The Monroe Doctrine and American Expansionism, 1843-1849* (1966); a book of essays, *The Oregon Question* (1967); *The Fruits of Propaganda in the Tyler Administration* (1971); and *Slavery and the Annexation of Texas* (1972).

In 1966 Fred wrote his former student John Morton Blum that he had recently returned to his first love, the westward movement, 'after some years of desertion of it in pursuing the red-haired muse of diplomatic history.' Proceeding with his customary thoroughness and caution, over the next ten years he completed a massive manuscript to be published this

fall by Alfred Knopf. He was awaiting page proof at the time of his death.

Professor Merk did not like academic publicity or the obvious pursuit of professional honors. Small of stature, thin and frail-looking, he seemed to be shy and retiring. Over the years he declined to speak in public, claiming that his voice was weak and that it became husky and indistinguishable after a short time. But the honors came anyway. He was a member of the Massachusetts Historical Society, a fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, president of the Agricultural History Society (1948) and of the Mississippi Valley Historical Society (1959). He was made an honorary life member of the Western History Association in 1969. He was elected to AAS in April 1946. In 1958 Harvard conferred an honorary degree on him and in 1971 Wisconsin awarded him an L.H.D. Fred may have seemed frail and shy, but he confided to a friend shortly before his death that he was 'tough.' The evidence is all on the side of his own self-evaluation.

Professor Merk is survived by his wife, Lois Bannister Merk, a daughter, Katherine (Mrs. Robert S. Freeman), a son, Frederick Bannister Merk, and four grandchildren.

Howard R. Lamar

MILTON HALSEY THOMAS

Historian, collector, editor, genealogist, archivist, bibliographer, indexer, and diarist, Milton Halsey Thomas was a gentleman scholar and friend of scholars, warmly regarded for his learning, loyalty, and generosity. Self-effacing to a fault (the 'Milton' always made him uneasy), he sought to combine excellence of matter with excellence of manner. The blend was unique. Previewing proofsheets of Halsey's great edition of *The Diary of Samuel Sewall* (1973), Clifford K. Shipton, a friend of four decades, wrote on June 27, 1966:

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