

Obituary

RICHARD BEALE DAVIS

The greatest modern authority on early Southern literature, Richard Beale Davis, won the National Book Award for history in 1979 for his magisterial three-volume *Intellectual Life in the Colonial South, 1585-1763*. This magnum opus summarizes and analyzes the South's intellectual culture, presenting a host of new materials with painstaking accuracy and thorough documentation. It was the work of his lifetime and has created the possibility for numerous specialized studies which will build upon his splendid achievement.

Dick was born at Accomac, on Virginia's Eastern Shore, June 3, 1907, the son of the Reverend Henry Woodhouse Davis and Margaret Josephine (Wills) Davis. He took his undergraduate degree at Randolph-Macon College in 1927, and both the M.A. and Ph.D. at the University of Virginia, in 1933 and 1936. While doing graduate work, he taught at the McGuire University School, 1927-30; at Randolph-Macon Academy, 1930-32; and at the University of Virginia, 1933-36. He and Lois Camp Bullard were married on August 25, 1936, after which Dick taught at Mary Washington College, 1936-40. After publishing his first book, *Francis Walker Gilmer: Life and Learning in Jefferson's Virginia* (1939), he joined the University of South Carolina's English department as an associate professor. During World War II, he served in the United States Navy. After returning to the University of South Carolina, he brought out an edition of the *Correspondence of Thomas Jefferson and Francis Walker Gilmer* (1946) and was promoted to full professor. In 1947, he was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship and joined the University of Tennessee's faculty. Thereafter his permanent home was in Knoxville. His

research in the manuscript collections of the Huntington Library resulted in accurate, annotated editions of Thomas Holley Chivers's *Life of Poe* (1952) and *Jeffersonian America: The Notes on the United States of America Collected in the Years 1805-6-7 by Sir Augustus John Foster* (1954). During 1953-54, he served as a Fulbright professor at the University of Oslo.

In 1955, Dick published the standard biography of a great Elizabethan man of letters who spent several years in Virginia, *George Sandys, Poet-Adventurer: A Study in Anglo-American Culture in the Seventeenth Century*, as well as a monograph on *The Abbé Correa in America, 1812-1820: The Contributions of the Diplomat and Natural Philosopher to the Foundations of Our National Life*. He enjoyed a Folger Library fellowship during 1955 and was also awarded a Doctor of Letters degree by his alma mater, Randolph-Macon College. During 1960-61, he held a second Guggenheim Fellowship. The University of Tennessee appointed him Alumni Distinguished Service professor in 1962. His elaborate edition of a late seventeenth-century Virginia planter's letter-book appeared in 1963 as *William Fitzbugh and His Chesapeake World, 1676-1701*. In the following year, his major study of Southern intellectual life during the early national period, *Intellectual Life in Jefferson's Virginia, 1790-1830* (1964), won the manuscript award of the American Association for State and Local History. The South Atlantic Modern Language Association elected Dick president for 1964-65. He served as president of the Society for the Study of Southern Literature in 1968-70.

Dick brought out another painstaking and elaborate edition of early Southern manuscripts in 1967, *The Colonial Virginia Satirist: Mid-Eighteenth Century Commentaries on Politics, Religion, and Society*. The following year he edited *The Collected Poems of Samuel Davies, 1723-1761* (1968). In 1973, a selection from his more than one hundred essays was published under the title *Literature and Society in Early Virginia, 1608-1840*.

Awarded a National Endowment for the Humanities Fellowship in 1974 for work on his *Intellectual Life in the Colonial South*, Dick also took an active role in the seminars at the Research Triangle in North Carolina. When he retired from teaching at the University of Tennessee in 1977, where he had directed the English department's graduate program for over a decade, he was honored by a celebration featuring the presentation of a festschrift entitled *Essays in Early Virginia Literature Honoring Richard Beale Davis* and a certificate from the American Antiquarian Society, which had elected him to membership in 1973. Although his correspondence with Clarence S. Brigham and the Society dates back to 1950, he was able to visit the Society only once, for the October 1974 meeting.

In 1977, the Early American Literature Group of the Modern Language Association named him its Honored Scholar. After the publication of his monumental *Intellectual Life in the Colonial South*, Dick received honorary degrees from the College of William and Mary and from Eastern Kentucky University. His Lamar Memorial Lectures at Mercer University appeared in 1979 as *A Colonial Southern Bookshelf: Reading in the Eighteenth Century*. At the time of his death Dick was writing a book devoted to the 'Intellectual Life in the Revolutionary South, 1763-1790,' and collaborating on a bibliography of Southern manuscript sermons before 1800. He died on March 30, 1981, in Knoxville. His wife of forty-five years and two sisters survive him.

J. A. Leo Lemay

Copyright of Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society is the property of American Antiquarian Society and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.