

OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES

Oliver Wendell Holmes, historian, encyclopedist, and archivist, was born on February 2, 1902, in St. Paul, Minnesota; he died on November 25, 1981, in Washington, D.C. When his Swedish-born parents named him, they inadvertently assured him a lifetime of explaining that he was not, in fact, related to the poet and jurist whose names he bore.

After growing up on the family farm near Money Creek in southeastern Minnesota, Oliver enrolled at Carleton College, from which he graduated in 1922. He then spent three years in pursuit of his doctorate in history at Columbia University, and while there became an assistant in the map and American history rooms of the New York Public Library. This led to employment for two years on the staff of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, where he wrote some 400 articles dealing with American history and biography for its fourteenth edition. He subsequently joined the staff of the Columbia University Press and wrote several thousand articles for the *Columbia Encyclopedia's* first edition. He was also a contributor to the *Dictionary of American History* and the *Dictionary of American Biography*.

It was during his career as an encyclopedist that Oliver began the serious study of the stagecoach. It was a scholarly love affair that lasted a lifetime. Because of the press of other duties, and a compulsion for comprehensive and painstaking research, he did not complete his doctoral dissertation for thirty years. Finally, in 1956, Columbia University bestowed the Ph.D. on Oliver; the subject of his dissertation was 'Stagecoach and Mail from Colonial Days to 1820.'

In the meantime, Oliver's life and horizons were expanding. In 1927 he married Dorothy Behner, a personable and talented young lady who received her Ph.D. from New York University and then, during the depths of the Depression, pursued and won her M.D. from the University of Pennsylvania. Two chil-

dren were born to them, Benson Venables and Helena Victoria (Morrison).

In 1936, the Holmeses moved to Washington, D.C., where Dorothy began a distinguished career in ophthalmology and Oliver joined the staff of the newly established National Archives. Over the next twenty-five years he served in a number of important posts in that institution, many of them involved with the administration of permanently valuable federal records dealing with the development of the American West.

During the years 1945–48 he served as program adviser to Solon J. Buck, the second archivist of the United States. In that position he played an important but largely unsung role in developing proposals for a United Nations Archives, an archival development program for UNESCO, and the establishment of the International Council on Archives. His seminal contributions to international archival programs were recognized in 1972 by his election to honorary membership in the International Council on Archives, on the occasion of its seventh international congress in Moscow.

During Oliver's career at the National Archives, largely as an administrator, he exercised an important influence on the development of basic archival theory and practice. One of the most widely used and quoted studies ever to appear in the *American Archivist* is his article entitled 'Archival Arrangement—Five Different Operations at Five Different Levels' (January 1964). His contributions to the development of an American archival profession were not, however, limited to his many writings, but included lecturing and teaching as well. He served as adjunct professor of archives administration at the American University from 1957–64.

The most visible, and perhaps the most productive, part of Oliver's career began in 1961, when he was appointed executive director of the National Historical Publications Commission, an adjunct of the National Archives. For eleven years, until his retirement, he unflaggingly encouraged and assisted

projects for the publication of the documentary sources of this nation's history. Perhaps the best-known of these are the 'Founding Fathers' projects—the papers of the Adams family, Jefferson, Madison, Hamilton, and Franklin. Others encompassed the papers of John C. Calhoun, Archbishop John Carroll, Jefferson Davis, John C. Fremont, Ulysses S. Grant, Joseph Henry, Henry Laurens, Will Rogers, Booker T. Washington, and Woodrow Wilson, to pick a few at random.

During the early years of his tenure as executive director, the commission had no funds at its disposal to provide direct support for any of these projects, and Oliver's efforts centered on finding institutional sponsors, qualified editors, and non-federal funding sources. Beginning in 1964, Congress began to place at the commission's disposal funds for a very modest program of grants to documentary publication projects. It is doubtful if any federal grant monies have been nurtured as carefully, stretched as far, or used in so catalytic a fashion as the NHPC grants under Oliver's administration. In addition to providing limited direct support to some of the projects for letterpress publication of documentary sources, the commission also undertook an ambitious program of encouraging the publication in microfilm of less well-known historical sources. At the time of Oliver's retirement in early 1972, the commission had provided sponsorship and support to 53 publication projects that had thus far produced more than 160 volumes, and to 104 microfilm publications comprising 2,607 rolls of film.

As the then-mandatory retirement age of seventy approached, a small group of Oliver's friends and colleagues began to discuss an appropriate means of recognizing his service. The group, eventually known as the Committee of Five on Operation Stagecoach (four of whom were members of the American Antiquarian Society), oversaw the preparation of a slender volume which included a biographical sketch, an essay on stagecoaches and the mail by Oliver, and excerpts about stagecoach-

ing gleaned from among the papers of fourteen of the documentary publication projects. Published in a limited edition, *Shall Stagecoaches Carry the Mail?* was a fitting tribute to the man, his lifelong scholarly interests, and his unique career of public service.

In retirement, Oliver continued to pursue his research interests, to write, and to engage in the activities of the many professional organizations to which he belonged. He had been a founding member of the Society of American Archivists and served as its president in 1958–59. He was also a member of the Institute of Early American History and Culture, the American Historical Association, the Western History Association, the Southern Historical Association, the Organization of American Historians, the American Association for State and Local History, the Agricultural History Society, and the Westerners. He was, in addition, a member of eight state historical organizations located from Massachusetts to Nevada.

He was very proud of his membership in the American Antiquarian Society, to which he was elected in April 1963. In a brief letter of thanks to Ted Shipton soon after being elected, Oliver noted with characteristic modesty that this honor 'comes I know not for achievements, but in recognition of the importance of the position I am holding. I can only through my work in that position try to be worthy of the company I am in.' Although he was unable to participate frequently in the affairs of the Society, he did present a paper at the 1964 semiannual meeting entitled 'The Stagecoach Tavern.'

Oliver's friends and family gathered at a memorial service in his honor on December 3, 1981, at his beloved Cosmos Club, where only six months earlier he and many of the same group had met for a similar service for Dorothy.

Flanking the Pennsylvania Avenue entrance to the National Archives Building are two massive figures seated on granite pedestals. The pedestal on the left bears a quotation from Shakespeare's *Tempest*: 'What is Past is Prologue,' and is sur-

mounted by a youthful female figure. Inscribed on the pedestal to the right is the inscription 'Study the Past.' It is surmounted by a pensive toga-clad male figure. Many years ago a waggish young colleague referred to the latter as Oliver Wendell Holmes. There was indeed a similarity that became more striking as the sculpture weathered and as the years crept up on Oliver. I never had the temerity to mention it to him, but now I regret the omission, for I think, somehow, that he might have been pleased.

James B. Rhoads

ADLORE HAROLD LANCOUR

A complex and gentle man is not easily described by the abbreviated and strained entries of standard biographical reference books. Seldom do the separate labels add up to a recognizable whole being. '*Lancour, Adlore Harold*, educator, librarian,' describes a mere fragment of an active life and misses the person at the center. And, at the center of Harold Lancour's life were books and people.

Harold Lancour (b. Duluth, Minnesota, June 27, 1908) was by birth a son of the Midwest but by interest and involvement his life and his activity ranged worldwide. Early in life he chose librarianship for a profession, earning both a bachelor's and a master's degree in library service from Columbia University. He was awarded the Ed.D. degree from Columbia in 1947. His training and experience thereafter included reference work at New York Public Library (1935-37) and a variety of responsible positions in library service and teaching at Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art (1937-47). A short term of military service in Europe was followed by extensive world travel for UNESCO, the Carnegie Corporation, the Ford Foundation, and the Agency for International Development. Lancour library visits and surveys extended from Paris

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