

Obituaries

HOMER DANIELS BABBIDGE, JR.

Education, says the dictionary, is 'the development of the special and general abilities of the mind,' and, similarly, an educator is defined as 'one who educates.' In every sense of the word, Homer Daniels Babbidge, Jr., was an educator who devoted his life to 'leading forth' the mental and moral powers of the people of the United States, especially the citizens of Connecticut. Babbidge employed his versatile talents and lively wit in the service of education in a remarkable range of positions in educational, cultural, business, and governmental organizations.

Homer Daniels Babbidge, Jr., was born in West Newton, Massachusetts, on May 18, 1925, the third son of Homer Daniels Babbidge, a merchant sea captain, and Allalie Lavinia (Adams) Babbidge. In 1929, the family moved to New Haven, Connecticut, where young Homer spent his boyhood. The family later moved to Amherst, New York, when Homer's father retired from the sea and took a job as Inspector of Ports in Buffalo. Homer decided that he would attend Yale University, as his football hero Albie Booth had done. Upon his graduation from high school, Homer won a scholarship to Yale. He spent the next ten years there, taking his Ph.D. in American studies, teaching and counseling from time to time, and gaining administrative experience in the Student Appointment Bureau, the Division of Financial Aid, and the Yale Program of American Studies for Foreign Students, the last of which he helped to found.

From 1955 to 1962, Babbidge was in Washington, D.C., where he served successively as special assistant to the U.S. Commissioner of Education, assistant to the secretary of the

Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, and assistant U.S. commissioner of education. It was there, too, that he met and married Marcia Adkinson. Babbidge played an important part in securing Congressional approval of the National Defense Education Act, after which he was given the task of administering the Act. The breadth and historical depth of his vision of the federal government's role in education were made fully apparent in the book he coauthored with Robert M. Rosenzweig, entitled *The Federal Interest in Higher Education* (1962). In that study, the authors declared their strong belief 'that higher education is important; that the people of the United States have a vital stake in its strength and vitality; that this stake has become increasingly manifest in the actions of the Federal Government; and that this important area of public policy—like all others in our system of government—must be fully and freely debated by an informed citizenry.' They also endorsed the Congress's call for 'programs that will give assurance that no student of ability will be denied an opportunity for higher education because of financial need,' an objective Babbidge was to stress during his tenure as president of the University of Connecticut.

For his able service in the educational agencies of the federal government, Babbidge was awarded HEW's Distinguished Service Medal in 1961. In the same year, he was named vice-president of the American Council on Education with the stipulation, made by him, that his tenure would end if he were offered the presidency of the University of Connecticut, left vacant by the resignation of Albert N. Jorgensen. On the supposition that Babbidge was too young and unknown to receive such an offer, this stipulation was accepted. The supposition proved ill-founded.

In 1962, at the age of thirty-six, Babbidge began a decade of distinguished service as president of the University of Connecticut. Formerly a small A & M college, this institution had been moving toward full university status since World War II.

Babbidge took the helm at a very propitious time, when federal and state support for education were reaching a high point, and he made the most of his opportunities. His first priorities were the development of graduate studies and the strengthening of the liberal arts program. Perceiving that a first-rate library was essential for these purposes, he set out to procure funds for book acquisitions, staff services, and the physical plant. A new addition to the Wilbur Cross Library was under construction at the time, but Babbidge, foreseeing future needs, took the lead in planning and securing funds for a much larger and better-equipped building. This library was constructed after his resignation and named in his honor in May 1984. The Babbidge Library and the new Graduate Center, standing side by side at the center of the campus as Babbidge had wished, form a permanent memorial to his vision of educational excellence. The University Health Center in Farmington is another product of Babbidge's initiative and foresight.

In the midst of these duties, Babbidge found time to edit and publish selected writings of Noah Webster under the title *On Being American* (1967). Babbidge's own enlightened enthusiasm for the possibilities of American culture breathes through his beautifully written 'Introduction':

The genius of Webster's contribution to America's self-image was his recognition that union is built not of laws and policies or of economic and political advantage alone, but of all of these welded together by the spirit and symbols of national self-consciousness. His life was a combination of breadth of conception and interest, as reflected in his extraordinary range of writings, and a marked singleness of purpose. Politics was only one important expression of the varied media through which he tried to promote that single object—the creation of a free and unified America.

The last five years of Babbidge's tenure as university president were a severe test of his qualities of leadership. Beset with student protest movements ranging from Black Power to

women's rights and anti-Vietnam War demonstrations, Babbidge managed by force of character, personality, and balanced judgment to retain the respect of most of the faculty and students and to steer the university through this turbulent period with minimum damage to academic standards and the university's sense of community. The petition bearing 7,000 signatures urging him not to resign at the end of his tenth year (as he had said he would do when he was inaugurated) bore impressive testimony to the strong bonds he had formed with the students, staff, and faculty. The quality of his mind and spirit are preserved in his selected speeches as president of the university, published by the Alumni Association under the title *Fitted to the Burden*.

After his resignation from the presidency of the University of Connecticut, Babbidge returned to Yale as master of Timothy Dwight College and fellow of the Institution for Social and Policy Studies. In the spring of 1973 he launched his campaign for the Democratic nomination for the governorship of Connecticut. His friends and acquaintances felt, with good reason, that he would make an excellent governor. However, he had no political base and little political experience, and the venture collapsed when the late Ella Grasso announced her intention to seek the office. Babbidge returned to the educational arena, accepting the presidency of the Hartford Graduate Center in 1976. He did much to build up the reputation and library facilities of that institution, meanwhile playing a highly constructive role in a variety of civic and educational enterprises, such as the Committee on the Old State House, the Connecticut Humanities Council, the Connecticut State Library Board, the Governor's Conference on Library and Information Services, the Civic Center Commission, and the Connecticut Public Broadcasting Corporation. Especially noteworthy was his role in planning and narrating the television series on Connecticut history entitled 'The Connecticut Heritage.' In April 1979 he was elected a member of the American

Antiquarian Society in recognition of his contributions to the study of the history of American culture, not the least interesting of which were his two books on corkscrews (his favorite hobby): *Guide to American Corkscrew Patents* (1978) and *Corkscrews for Collectors* (1981), the latter co-authored with Bernard Watney. Babbidge was a valued member of the Society, serving for a time as chairman of the Committee on Membership. In October 1979 he was elected to the Council of the Society.

Universally liked and respected, Babbidge served the cause of education in innumerable ways, retaining his verve and racy sense of humor to the end, despite the ravages of a terminal disease. He died on March 27, 1984, at the age of fifty-eight. 'I've led a good life. I've been a lucky man,' he told his friends. He is survived by his wife, Marcia Adkinson Babbidge, a son Alexander, and two daughters, Aimee and Sandra.

John C. Greene

HOWARD BONAR JEFFERSON

Howard Bonar Jefferson, or 'Jeff' as he was affectionately called, was aptly named. Like America's third president, he too was a gentle giant, a philosopher involved with universities, and a man passionately dedicated to the idea of academic freedom.

In appearance Jeff was a commanding presence. William Koelsch, a Clark faculty member, upon first meeting Jeff in 1957 noted in his diary, 'President Jefferson seemed to dominate the room with [the] force of [his] personality. Must be [an] impressive person to know.' Indeed, he was. His warmth, concern for others, and sense of Christian charity would have made him a success in many fields, but these qualities were particularly appropriate in his chosen career of education.

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