

Obituaries

MILTON KLEIN

Milton Klein, who died on June 10, 2004, was a gifted scholar, inspiring teacher, talented university historian, but above all, a great human being. He stretched out a helping hand to everyone around him: his students, fellow faculty members, the Knoxville community, the historical profession, and the general reading public. Perhaps because most of his family members in Europe had been killed in the Holocaust, Milton kept trying to reconstitute a sense of family wherever he went.

As a scholar, Milton was nationally known and once was described as the 'dean' of colonial New York historians. His 1954 dissertation at Columbia University was on William Livingston, the prominent New York lawyer called the 'Penman of the Revolution.' Livingston expressed seminal ideas on why the thirteen colonies should separate from Britain. Fellow scholars recognized immediately that Milton's work constituted a major contribution. One important historian called it 'brilliant,' another 'superb,' and a third 'one of the best political biographies available on the eighteenth century.' Despite its high quality, however, the dissertation was not published until 1990, and a corrected version appeared in 1993.

Milton's work, nevertheless, attracted the attention of top-flight historians when first written. Bernard Bailyn of Harvard asked Milton to produce a scholarly edition of *The Independent Reflector*—the weekly journal of essays published by Livingston and two lawyer friends in the early 1750s. Bailyn plumbed these essays to produce his Pulitzer-prize-winning book, *The Intellectual*

Origins of the American Revolution, which changed our view of the Revolution and demonstrated how far ahead these essays on political thought were from the rest of America.

Studying Livingston's legal career placed Milton ahead of the curve in the growing movement that began analyzing the colonial legal profession. His penetrating articles on New York lawyers and the coming of the Revolution won him two prizes from the journal *New York History*. With his outstanding leadership qualities, Milton was elected president of the American Society of Legal History in the early 1980s, as well as president of the Southeastern American Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies.

His mind was perpetually racing and his intellectual curiosity aroused wherever he travelled. During his so-called 'summer vacations' in Scotland, the homeland of his wife, Margaret, he began poking into the Scottish archives, which soon resulted in two publications. The first was a study of the peace initiative launched in 1775 by a self-styled Scottish nobleman, Lord Drummond. The second was the letterbook of General James Robertson, who commanded the troops in New York City, the British military seat, during the Revolutionary War. Co-edited with a former graduate student, the work demonstrated how Robertson performed first as military governor and then as civil governor when the British tried unsuccessfully to establish an administration during the closing years of the war.

Although he focused primarily on New York, Milton cast his net far wider. He repeatedly stressed one major theme: that not only the New York colony but the middle colonies as a whole were more prototypical of the American democratic tradition that eventually emerged in the young republic. He suggested in a 1972 article that the middle colonies were often relegated to a secondary status and portrayed as a combination of New England and Southern institutional forms with little separate character of their own. Milton suggested instead that the middle colonies constituted a more representative model of modern America because of their diversity in ethnic, cultural, and political terms. His

hypothesis triggered a major historiographical controversy when printed and then reproduced in his book of collected essays called *The Politics of Diversity*.

One of Milton's most enduring contributions was the thirteen-volume *History of the American Colonies*, which he initiated and for which he served as general editor with Jacob Cooke. Published during the bicentennial of the American Revolution, the series was devoted to a fresh retelling of the story of English-American colonization. The series was part of Milton's effort to fulfill a lifelong ambition: to bring American history to a much wider audience and give the people back their history. Along these lines, he also served as co-editor of two other multivolume encyclopedia series.

Milton succeeded in his quest, and experienced great satisfaction when his last major edited work—*The Empire State*—was selected by the History Book Club in 2001. This readable history of New York State written by distinguished authorities was described as being both 'lively' and 'engrossing.'

Besides being a widely published scholar, Milton was an exceptional teacher. At the University of Tennessee he received the Outstanding Teacher Award in 1974, was named Alumni Distinguished Service Professor in 1977, and was made a Lindsay Young Professor in 1980. Demanding in the classroom, he was intolerant of mediocre effort, but encouraging to those interested. Seeking always to bring out the best in students, he mentored them in surprising ways.

One measure of his success as a talented teacher was the large bequest left to the university in his honor by a former graduate student. The Klein Lecture Endowment Fund brings outstanding scholars to the Tennessee campus and exposes students to the latest research in American history. To Milton, one of the most satisfying aspects of the fund was that it also provided scholarships to support graduate students.

Milton's distinguished teaching career extended over fifty years. It began in the New York City high school system where he

taught for ten years. His mentor at Columbia University, Richard B. Morris, and I urged him to enter college teaching, which he did in 1954 as an instructor at Columbia. The next year he left high school teaching permanently to teach at Long Island University and the State University of New York, Fredonia, until 1969, when he accepted an appointment to the University of Tennessee.

Along the way, he accepted other temporary positions. He held a Fulbright Teaching Award at the University of Canterbury in New Zealand, and a one-year appointment at the New York University Law School. His abilities as an administrator were recognized by Long Island University with his appointment as Dean of Arts and Sciences and by Fredonia, where he became Dean of Graduate Studies.

Disregarding the town-gown divide that often exists, Milton became deeply involved in the Knoxville area celebration of the bicentennial of the United States Constitution. It was another effort on his part to give history back to the people. He served as chairman of the Knoxville-Knoxville County Committee that Chief Justice Warren Burger, the national bicentennial committee chairman, called one of the most active and successful committees in the country. The local committee expressed its appreciation by planting a tree in Milton's honor. He also served as chairman of the University of Tennessee's committee on the bicentennial, which celebrated the years 1987 to 1991, ending with the commemoration of the Bill of Rights.

Three years after his retirement from teaching in 1985, Milton was made the first University Historian of the University of Tennessee. In that capacity he continued to give the people back their history in a different way—by lecturing about the university to student groups, civic organizations, and alumni chapters around the country. For the bicentennial of the University of Tennessee, he published a book called *Volunteer Moments: Vignettes of the History of the University of Tennessee, 1794-1994*.

I have not mentioned Milton's multifaceted activities in other areas of his life: his military service in World War II, where in the

Reserves after the war he rose to the rank of lieutenant colonel; or his work on the local chapter of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) for which he received an award; or the Chancellor's Citation for Extraordinary Service that he received in 1988 and 1998.

This sketch of his activities hardly captures the spirit of Milt Klein the man. A warm and open person, he had a quick wit, which added to his attractive personality. A sparkling conversationalist, he always had something important to say and did not care for small talk. He was a compulsive letter writer, another dimension of his reaching-out tendencies. Milt's outstanding personality traits, I believe, were four in number: his courage, integrity, generosity, and compassion. He was courageous, constantly championing the right of free inquiry of ideas, even when that effort was not popular. You could also count on Milt's integrity because he would never abandon his ideals no matter what opposition was brought to bear. He was generous, and if anything, generous to a fault. Over the years, literally hundreds of scholars (myself included) sent him drafts of their work to edit because he was such a superb stylist. He worked unselfishly to better the work of others, and often without recognition. Finally, Milton had a deeply compassionate personality. In this world where self-interest is often paramount, he had the capacity to feel the pain of others.

These personal traits endeared Milt to all who knew him, and we shall miss him much. Milt had one other great personal quality: self-effacement. He used to joke about the epitaph he wanted on his tombstone: 'He Tried.' Despite his glowing achievements, Milt felt somehow that he had failed to do all he wanted. He once wrote, 'I suspect I may not be remembered for the number of books under my name in the library card or on-line catalogues, but I hope I will be remembered for the lives I've touched in the course of over a half-century of teaching.' His instincts were wrong and right at one and the same time. He will be remembered, for his scholarship will endure. But he will be remembered

also as an eloquent and inspiring teacher. His family, friends, and colleagues who appreciated his fine qualities as a splendid human being will all remember him.

Milton was elected a member of the Society in 1986 and was pleased at the honor.

George Athan Billias

NORMAN LAWRENCE SHARFMAN

When Norman L. Sharfman died on June 22, 2004, at the age of eighty-nine, Worcester's daily newspaper, the *Telegram and Gazette*, ran the following headline on the front page: 'Worcester Loses Activist Businessman; Sharfman Recalled as Gentleman Athlete.' Those few words aptly describe the adult life of one of Worcester's leading citizens. Sharfman became a member of the American Antiquarian Society in 1995 and attended every annual meeting thereafter until 2003, when illness prevented him from doing so. In addition, he always included AAS's annual fund among his many charitable contributions, and he made capital gifts to AAS as well.

He was a native of Worcester, attended its public schools and was graduated from the University of Michigan in 1937 with honors in economics and business. Upon his graduation from Michigan, he and his father founded Sharfman's Jewelers, which remains one of the few world-class stores in Worcester. After managing the store for forty-nine years, he retired in 1986, having sold the business to a group of Sharfman management employees. In 1939 he married Dorothy Kashman, a graduate of Smith College, who died in 1989. The Sharfmans had no children. His niece, Nora Lester Murad, her husband and their two daughters filled that void during the latter part of his life, visiting him almost every weekend.

Sharfman was a tireless worker with strong convictions, but he was also a very soft-spoken man, very courtly in manner, and a gentleman in every sense of the word. Like many others of his

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