

ALEXANDER WILBOURNE WEDDELL

No choice of a member within recent years held more promise than the election of Alexander Weddell, of Richmond, Virginia, in October, 1947. Friendly to many of the officers of the Society, and a distinguished student of Virginia history, he seemed destined to become an active and interested member. Yet within three months of the time of his election he and his wife were tragically killed in a train wreck in Missouri on January 1, on their way to a winter vacation in Arizona. It was a sudden and appalling end to an honorable life.

Alexander Weddell was born in Richmond on April 6, 1876, the son of the Reverend Alexander Watson and Penelope Wright Weddell. He pursued special studies at George Washington University in 1904-1907 and there received the degree of LL.B. in 1908. During his college years, he held a clerical position in the Library of Congress. He then entered upon a long period of foreign diplomatic service, in secretarial or consular positions successively at Copenhagen, Zanzibar in East Africa, Catania in Italy, Athens, Beirut in Syria, Cairo, Athens again, Calcutta and Mexico City. In 1933 he was appointed ambassador to Argentina, and in 1939 ambassador to Spain, from which latter position he retired in 1942. During the next few years he was active in local civic affairs and in Pan American projects.

Always interested in historical study, Mr. Weddell produced in 1930 a monumental volume on *Virginia Historical Portraiture*, and two years later a work on *Richmond in Old Prints*. He also contributed to various publications in history and travel. He received the honorary degrees of Litt.D. from Hampden-Sydney College, LL.D. from the University of Richmond and the College of William and Mary, and

L.H.D. from Rollins College. He married, May 31, 1923, Virginia Chase Steedman, widow of James Harrison Steedman. In 1926 they constructed one of the most notable of American houses, a portion of which was rebuilt from Warwick Priory, a sixteenth century English house, and another portion a reproduction of Sulgrave Manor, the ancestral home of the Washington family in England. In this attractive mansion called "Virginia House," the Weddells dispensed an unforgettable hospitality, especially to historical groups visiting Richmond. The writer will always remember the reception which Mr. Weddell gave in honor of the Walpole Society, in which notable organization he was one of the leading members. His last cultural contribution was the *Description of Virginia House*, a sumptuous volume which only Mr. Weddell himself could write. Through the deaths of Mr. and Mrs. Weddell, the Virginia Historical Society, of which he was President, received the greater portion of their joint estates, as well as "Virginia House," which had already been deeded to the Society in 1929.

C. S. B.

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