

MEMORIES OF THE PRINCETON HISTORY DEPARTMENT 1929-1933

Richard W. Leopold

Editor's foreword: "In every era, at every university, there are one or two faculty members of such renown that their courses become the sine qua non for the complete university experience. At Northwestern, Richard Leopold was such a teacher and his History C-13 was such a course." Thus opens a Profile in a recent issue of Northwestern Perspectives. Dick was more than a teacher of history, and his former students recently showed their lasting affection by establishing a Lecture Series in his name financed solely by their donations.

Quoting further from the Profile, " 'That's the Leopold network', remarks William Thomas Heyck, current chair of the history department. 'It's just a very unusual group of people and it's a group because of him.' 'We call ourselves Leopold people,' says one of them. 'We were adopted'. 'The thing about Dick Leopold,' says alumna Mary Livingston Peterson, 'is that you're not just a student while you're there. You're a student for life. - - - He inspires such incredible loyalty because he is such a good friend, as well as a demanding and encouraging teacher.' - It is reported that Leopold still corresponds with more than 300 of his former students.

"I consider him one of the two or three most important people in my life," says Arizona Congressman James Kolbe. 'He is a one-man alumni operation for Northwestern University.' "

Dick's definitive "The Growth of American Foreign Policy", published by Knopf in 1962, was a widely used text book in many universities. When students write their memories of Northwestern University's History Department, they'll have their own 'Buzzer Hall' to write about, except that the name will be Leopold.

The Princeton History Department of our day was small in size but rich in talent. With few advanced students to instruct, the emphasis was on the undergraduate. There were no teaching assistants. Full professors precepted in the courses of their colleagues. Majors had few options beyond the required year-long courses: sophomore European history after 1789 with Walter P. (Buzzer) Hall; junior Medieval history with Dana C. Munro; junior United States history with Thomas J. Wertenbaker and Clifton R. (Beppo) Hall; senior European history before 1789 with Raymond J. Sontag and Elmer A. Beller. We did independent reading on Greece and Rome as juniors, wrote a thesis as seniors, and took two sets of comprehensive examinations. Unaware that I would belatedly decide to do graduate work, I also took as a senior C. R. Hall's one-semester course on American Democracy and a year-long course on Latin America with the newly arrived Dana G. Munro, the son.

Although Munro and Wertenbaker were then regarded as the leading scholars, neither excelled in the classroom. The former was friendly and sincere, but I did not find his lectures or preceptorial stimulating. I recall

only his dictum that "orthodoxy is my doxy and heterodoxy is your doxy" and the pride he voiced, as we walked by the chapel in 1932, that his son was joining the faculty. Wertenbaker was courtly but aloof. His lectures, frankly, were dull, and his reading list at least a decade out of date. I suspected that he felt more at home with graduate students. The transition to Buzzer Hall was like a fresh breeze at sunrise. Leaving aside Gray C. Boyce, with whom I did independent reading and who taught me more about the middle ages in one preceptorial than did Munro in a year; Beller, who had the misfortune to follow Sontag as a lecturer; and the younger Munro, who had all the shortcomings of a beginning lecturer fresh from the State Department, I shall limit my account to the three men who became role models in my own teaching career - Buzzer Hall, Beppo Hall and Ray Sontag.

Buzzer Hall (1884-1962) was voted year after year the most popular professor. He was dynamic and exciting. Each lecture was a masterpiece, full of drama and vivid personalities. His preceptorials were challenging. I recall the very first question he posed: "When did the French Revolution begin?" That was a heady experi-

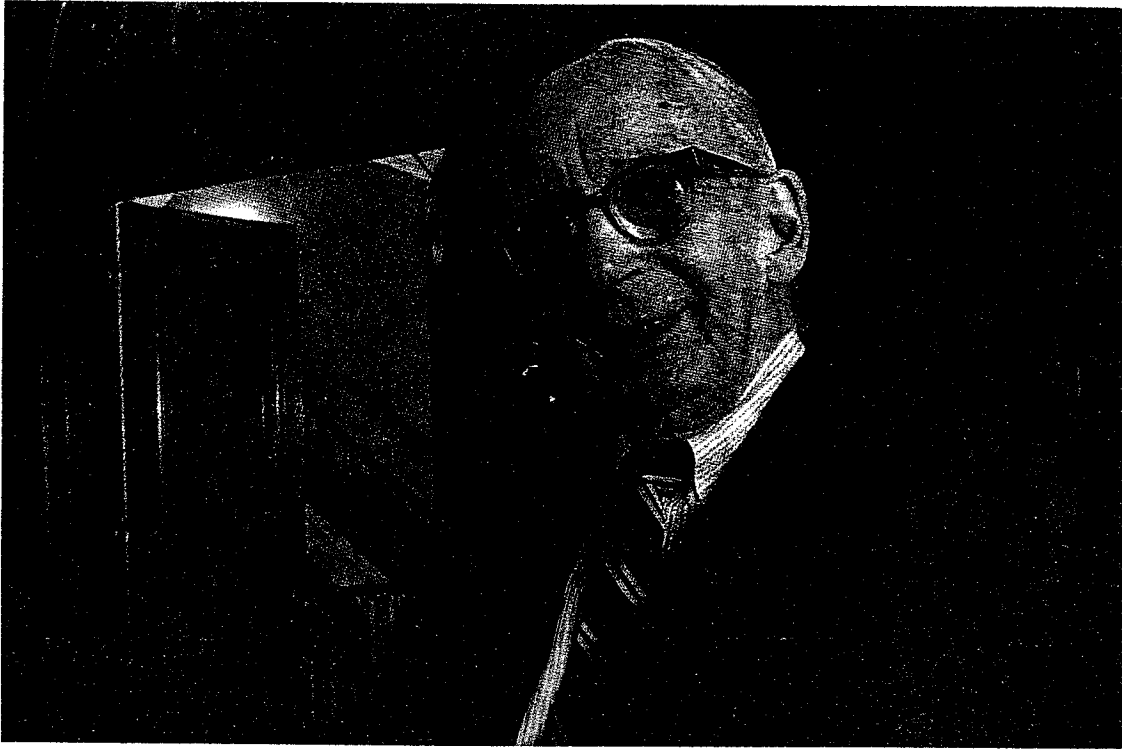
ence for a sophomore accustomed to being told, not asked. Since Buzzer was on leave for the second semester of 1930-31, I audited his lectures the next spring. As I stood outside of McCosh after one of them, he came up to me obviously agitated. Seeming to fight back tears, he said in effect that he had botched the lecture, that he had not said what he wanted to say. I was too embarrassed to appreciate then how much of himself he put into each lecture and what high standards he set for himself. Buzzer was also the second reader of my thesis directed by Sontag, and I still have his comments written on sheets torn from a bluebook. After his assessment, he suggested that I read two books that "were in the library of our old friend Sacco, the Boston shoemaker". He concluded: "It would be well if L. had not gone so strong on brevity. Like R.J.S., he is at times too curt in his statements. He cannot be docked, however, for following his master in that respect. You both need expanding."

Beppo Hall (1884-1945) is less well remembered because, unlike Buzzer, he did not live to retirement and beyond. I heard him lecture in two semesters and had him as a preceptor for three. Short of stature, with a high-pitched voice, his enthusiasm was contagious. He broadened my historical horizons by including literature, art, and music. An admirer of Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, he put aside the assignments on the day in January 1932 when we heard that Holmes had resigned and spent the hour discussing dissenting opinions. His attitude toward his students is evident in a letter he wrote me on January 4, 1934: "As for the 'New Deal' I am, as you imagined, both edified and overwhelmed. The principal strain comes from being looked to hopefully as an oracle for a solution of complicated controversial problems about which I am only a little less in the dark than the students themselves. You know that the young mind will not be content with the historical approach. That is as it should be, but it reduces the history teacher to the category of discarded lumber once he refuses to assume the tripod of Apollo. Probably there is a good deal of justice in that, too; but one would like to have

these thrilling youngsters cast an occasional glance behind them, if only to realize that Tipperary is a long way back and Heaven a long way ahead."

Thirteen years younger than the two Halls, Ray Sontag (1897-1972) was on the threshold of a career that would exceed their's in scholarly publication. Replacing Buzzer, who was on leave, in February 1931, he avoided any semblance of the dramatic but led us with clarity and skill through the intricacies of European diplomacy from 1871 to 1914. In my senior year his analyses and interpretations taught me more about the Renaissance and Reformation in one semester than I learned at Harvard as a graduate student in a full year course. He allowed me to write my thesis on Russian social thought from 1840 to 1890, although neither of us knew much about the subject, since Princeton then did not offer instruction in Russian history. He showed sympathy and understanding the week before theses were due. Bob Fulton had agreed, for a price, to type the final version but soon discovered that, even by staying up all night, he could not finish on time. I engaged a professional to do the second half but was aghast when I saw that her machine produced a type different from Bob's. Meeting Ray on Nassau Street, I asked in fear and trembling whether the difference was acceptable. Dryly, with a twinkle in his eye, he drawled: "I think I can read both types." His written comments on the thesis ended with words typical of the man: "I am inclined to think you should have defied my insistence on brevity. You had so much to say—all worth saying—that to get it all within compass made over-condensation necessary. My fault." Sontag left Princeton in 1941 and, except for service in the State Department, taught the rest of his days at the University of California, Berkeley.

A high point in my career came in December 1961 when we each read papers from the same platform before the American Historical Association. Two years before his death, when he asked what kind of a world he had in the 1930s promised his students, I replied on April 6, 1970: "You made no promises . . . To me, at that time, you were realism personified,



*"For 32 years, Richard Leopold left his mark on the hearts and minds of Northwestern students."
(quote from Northwestern Perspective)*

exhibited a tough historical skepticism and, beneath the surface, an intense concern for the well-being of those you taught."

The Princeton Campus Songs for 1933 prints faculty songs about the two Halls, neither of which I remember singing.

"Here's to foaming Buzzer Hall,
In History he found his call;
Old Garibaldi is his pet;
He's named his son for this old vet."

"Here's to our friend Beppo Hall,
He keeps the students on the ball.
Democracy's his favorite theme,
Just come in once and hear him scream."

On the other hand, I do recall the following song on Sontag.

"Here's to Sontag, Raymond J.
He'd like to give a test each day.
At the Prince he often sneers
Because it has so few ideas."