

While his direct contacts with the American Antiquarian Society were limited, a number of members knew Bill through other associations and regarded him highly. His wife, Elizabeth, spoke to the Worcester Association of Mutual Aid in Detecting Thieves at Antiquarian Hall in 1985, on the Shannons' experiences at the embassy in Dublin.

Though much of Bill Shannon's work was done against the broad canvas of Washington, New York, and Dublin, he spoke often and warmly of his formative years at South High and at Clark. He stood by his liberal views when they were fashionable and, later, when they were not. As a historian of his times, he provided a keen, valuable record of the world and its players.

He is survived by his wife and their three sons, Liam, Christopher, and David.

Robert Comey Achorn

ROBERT ERNEST SPILLER

Robert Ernest Spiller was born in Philadelphia on November 13, 1896, and died there August 24, 1988. He was the second child and eldest son of Dr. William Gibson Spiller and Helen Constance Newbold. Both families were closely tied to the University of Pennsylvania. His father was the first head of the Department of Neurology in the medical school and his mother's brother, William Romaine Newbold, was a distinguished professor of philosophy. Brought up in West Philadelphia, which was then on the outskirts of the city, he attended Episcopal Academy and the University of Pennsylvania, from which he received his bachelor's degree in 1917. He enlisted as a private in Base Hospital 20, a unit formed by the university's medical school, where he joined his brother-in-law Randolph G. Adams (AAS, 1924-51). The commencement of 1919 was a family affair. Spiller and his sister Helen received master's degrees and Adams a doctorate.

Spiller had ambitions to be a writer, but he soon realized that his career lay in the study and teaching of literature. He worked under Arthur Hobson Quinn, a pioneer in establishing American literature as a field of study in its own right, and received his doctorate in 1924. His dissertation, 'The American in England during the First Half-Century of Independence,' foretold his approach to literature as embracing more than simply belles lettres.

Following the familiar pattern of teaching while writing his dissertation, Spiller was an instructor at the university in 1920-21 before going nine miles out of town to Swarthmore College where he was to remain for twenty-four years. In 1922 he married Mary Scott. They had three children: William Scott, Constance Newbold, and Mary Miles. During his years at Swarthmore, Bob served on and often was chairman of important policy-making faculty committees. He was also a popular teacher, and a number of his students went on to successful writing careers. Among them was James Michener, whose recent gift to the college was in part inspired by his experience with Spiller. Summers were often spent teaching at such diverse places as Harvard, the University of Southern California, and Michigan. In 1928-29 he received a Guggenheim fellowship, which took him to England and resulted in *Fenimore Cooper, Critic of His Times*, published in 1931.

During these same years, Bob Spiller took a major part in the academic struggle to give the study of American literature an independent status. When he entered the field, the Modern Language Association treated it as a part of English literature. His achievements have been gracefully described by Robert H. Walker in his 'In Memoriam' in the *American Studies International Newsletter* of December 1988. The story is more fully told in Kermit Vanderbilt's *American Literature and the Academy: The Roots, Growth, and Maturity of a Profession* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1986). The most significant, tangible result of these efforts was *The Literary History of the United States*, first published in 1948. Although the joint editors were Spiller, Willard Thorp, Thomas H. Johnson, and Henry Siedel Canby, Spiller was

clearly the central figure. The study in his home in Swarthmore served as the editorial office for much of the time.

In 1945 Spiller accepted the invitation from his alma mater to return to succeed Arthur Hobson Quinn as president. The *Literary History* was published in 1948. Much of it belongs to the second half of his career, but its origins date from the Swarthmore years. His daughter Constance helped her father from time to time.

Some years before, Arthur Hobson Quinn, and others, had had the notion of a new field of study centered around American literature. After Spiller returned to Pennsylvania, this was developed into the American civilization program. Working jointly with Scully Bradley in the English department, and Roy Nichols and Thomas Cochran in the history department, this program became one of the first to achieve national prominence, particularly after Spiller had brought *The American Quarterly* to the university. He also played a role in exporting American literature and American studies. During the war, Sigmund Skaard, after escaping from Norway, came to study under him and was the first of a number of Europeans to seek Spiller's assistance in introducing the field to their universities. In 1950 Skaard arranged for Spiller to be a visiting professor at the University of Oslo. Spiller's influence also extended much farther east. In 1969 two of his Indian students published in Bombay *Indian Essays in American Literature, Papers in Honor of Robert E. Spiller*. A Brown University professor, who taught for a year in Vietnam, reported that one of his students could quote some of Spiller's writings almost verbatim.

Retiring in 1967, Bob received a Doctor of Humane Letters from his own university, a degree that, for obvious reasons, he valued somewhat more highly than the honorary degrees he received from two other American colleges and one German university. At the end of his career, Bob was asked by the university to help out with the newly endowed Annenberg School of Communications by acting as dean during its first year.

Bob was elected to membership in the American Antiquarian Society in 1962. He attended meetings sporadically, but in 1976 he

delivered one of the Bicentennial lectures sponsored by the Society. He also made numerous gifts to the library. In 1975 he represented the Society at the inauguration of the president of Dickinson College. Spiller also served as the principal member of the advisory committee on the writings of James Fenimore Cooper, still being sponsored jointly by the Society and Clark University, and he was instrumental in establishing the editorial procedures for that project.

Bob Spiller was one of the central figures in the emergence of the study of American culture as an entity. The more than twenty books and numerous articles that he wrote were scholarly contributions of the first importance. He also edited the works of Cooper, Emerson, and Henry Adams, and in 1934, with P. C. Blackburne, he edited the bibliography of Cooper that is still a standard tool. In addition, he was a consummate academic politician in the best sense of the word. He was highly effective at committee work and took great satisfaction in seeing committees get their work done. Most of all, however, he was a superb teacher for whom teaching and scholarship were part of a seamless whole. His students are spread throughout the worlds of universities, colleges, libraries, and letters. When asked by *Who's Who in America* to write his credo he provided the following: 'In my private life I have tried always to put love, loyalty, and friendship ahead of personal ambition and professional commitment. In my public life I have tried always to put the best interests of the goal or project to which I was committed ahead of the individual interests of myself and others involved. When challenged by something that I believed in I said to myself, "You have nothing to lose, so why not?" When by something that I did not believe in I said "You have other things to do."'

Bob's first wife, Mary, died in 1971. Four years later, he married Anna Wright, the widow of Dr. Mintern Wright, with whom, it turned out, Bob had served in Base Hospital 20 during the First World War. They settled in Chestnut Hill, Pennsylvania, and through his wife Bob acquired a whole new circle of friends beyond

the academic world. He said that both Anna and he benefited from the marriage: Anna got into *Who's Who* and he got into the *Social Register*. Bob enjoyed telling of the occasion when one of his Chestnut Hill friends, whom he had known for some time, said to him: 'Bob I understand that you have written a book.' His comment was, 'I knew I had made it.'

Raised as an Episcopalian, Bob became a convinced Friend during his Swarthmore years. After his move to Chestnut Hill, he became active in the Chestnut Hill Meeting, where he met Anna. He also played a vital role in the Meeting during particularly difficult times.

Although he could appear to be austere, especially to young nephews, Bob was at heart a gregarious man, with a delightful sense of humor. He was president of two of the numerous clubs to which he belonged: The Philobiblon and the Franklin Inn. A Philadelphian, and a distinguished one, Robert E. Spiller was proud of that and of the University of Pennsylvania, to which he brought so much distinction.

Thomas R. Adams

NICHOLAS BIDDLE WAINWRIGHT

Nicholas Biddle Wainwright, local historian and editor, was born in Saranac, New York, on July 12, 1914, son of Clement Reeves and Eugenia (Dixon) Wainwright. He grew up in the family house in Ambler in suburban Philadelphia and, after early schooling in the neighborhood, went off to Saint George's School in Newport, graduating in 1932. He entered Princeton in the Class of 1936 and, following graduation and a brief stint with an insurance company, he joined the staff of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, where he was to spend his entire adult life except for military service.

As assistant librarian at HSP during the golden years when Julian Boyd was in charge there, Wainwright corresponded with

Copyright of Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society is the property of American Antiquarian Society and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.